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WILT THOU HAVE THIS WOMAN?

BY

J. MACLAREN COBBAN,
Author of
"THE KING OF ANDAMAN," "MASTER OF HIS FATE," ETC.

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WILT THOU HAVE THIS WOMAN?

CHAPTER I

THE SQUIRE AND THE GENTLEMAN-FARMER

IT was September, and all the pleasant southern land lay smiling in the early sun, like a healthy child when first it wakes and waits for its mother's morning care. The charm of sunshine and silence, dream and departing slumber, breathed from the varied landscape. The chanticleers of the farmyards had some hour since sounded their long-drawn réveilles; the birds in the scattered scented firwoods and in the bunched trees of the park had ceased from the joyful burst of song with which they are wont to greet the first hint of dawn; and all created things now hung in patient expectation of the appearance of their master, man — man who "goeth forth unto his work and to his labour until the evening," who daily resumes his burden of toil and care, thought and speculation, of poverty and riches. The cows in the pasture grazed industriously, and now and then raised their heads to look for the boy who would come to drive them home for the morning milking; the watch-dogs sat upright outside their kennels, and eagerly listened for the first sound of the stirring hind or ostler; the half-felled

trees in the woods waited for the axe to be laid to them again; the last remainder of wheat waited to be cut, and the stubble fields waited to be ploughed.

Smoke began to ascend slowly from the chimneys of farm and cottage, and sounds of activity began to be heard. Doors opened, dogs barked, geese cackled, horses neighed, and men and women shouted,—and slowly and creakingly the mill of the day's business began to grind. It had been grinding slowly and steadily for more than an hour when seven struck softly on the old clock in the stable-turret of Pierrepont Hall,—the one great house of the neighbourhood, withdrawn within its extensive park from the common sounds of the world. The Pierrepont coachman and his underlings had been clattering about in their own domain for some time, but the Hall was still silent and its blinds undrawn. The only sound within was the solemn, subdued "tick! tick!" of the great hall clock. A tawny St. Bernard couched on the mat, with his nose on his forepaws, his eyes open, and his ears listening for the expected footstep of the person who should have appeared long ago to unbolt and unchain the hall door and let him out. It came—a distant creak on the stairs—and the dog sat upright and beat his tail on the mat. A man appeared, slowly descending the grand staircase, yawning and buttoning his waistcoat as he came—it was Thomas the footman. He talked in a whisper to the dog, who whined and muttered and pawed around him. He undid the door, and the dog bounded out. He flung the mat into the porch, and stood still yawning, and looked away over the sunlit landscape, in which the chestnuts and other early trees were showing the free touch of autumn, across the valley to the high heathland and downs on the west and south; for the prospect from Pierrepont Hall was superbly panoramic. He heard a step

behind him on the stairs and in the hall. He thought it must be Timmins the butler.

"Got down then, old cock?" said he, without turning. "Ow—aw!" he yawned again. "Nights in the town and late drives 'ome don't suit my constitootion. I've been gaping my 'ead off this last 'alf-hour. Ow! dear me! I wish there was some corfy ready."

"So do I, Thomas."

Thomas's jaws shut with a snap, and he span round on his heel: he was face to face with his master!—a big, six-foot, brown-whiskered gentleman, with ruddy face and careless hazel eye.

"Beg pardon, sir," said Thomas. "'Adn't no idea you was down yet, sir; thought it was Timmins, sir. Beg pardon, sir, I'm sure."

"That'll do, Thomas," said Squire Pierrepont, with a shrewd flash of his eye. "It is as bad manners to apologise too much as not to apologise at all. Late hours have not suited me either—only in the opposite way: I couldn't sleep. But I think you were born tired, Thomas. Is there any coffee being got ready in the kitchen?"

"No, sir; I think not, sir," answered Thomas. "I don't think the cook is down yet, sir."

"Not down yet?" exclaimed the Squire. "By George!" He swung round and looked in the face of the clock.

"Everything," said Thomas, "is put hoff an hour this morning, sir. Miss Perpont's horders, sir."

"Oh!" said the Squire. "Breakfast won't be till half-past nine, then?"

"No, sir."

"Well, I'll have a biscuit. And let breakfast be at half-past nine *sharp*; I have to go into town afterwards."

He turned to enter the dining-room. Thomas obsequiously stepped to open the door. He bustled round and undid the shutters, and the Squire went to

the sideboard, took a biscuit, and poured himself out a little wine and water. He returned into the hall breaking the biscuit in his hand, took his hat and a heavy ash-stick from the stand, and went out, and the tired Thomas began his duties.

The Squire tramped away over the gravel, whistling for his dog. It bounded out of a shrubbery; he gave it half his biscuit and ordered it to "come on." His was a simple, gentle, and lordly nature, of a class which the conditions of English rural life until recently generously fostered and made strong. Now that English agriculture is disappearing, that class is fast disappearing with it. Squire Pierrepont was an admirable representative of his excellent kind. He was a gentleman of descent so ancient and honourable that his name would be rather a compliment to a title than a title to it. He was proud of that, and was inclined to laugh at the baronetcy which had lately been conferred on his banker brother. He was a mighty hunter, and scorned the tight clothes, the tedium, the bad air, the late hours, and the general unwholesomeness of seasons in London, in which city he had scarcely set foot since his marriage. He liked to dwell among his own people, to rule them and help them, to scold and to admire them. He was free of speech and free of hand, and his expenditure was generous to a fault, without ostentation. He was beginning, however, in these days to be chafed by the necessity for considering before he filled in a cheque; for, though he refused fully to recognise it, his prosperity was already on the decline with the fall of prices and the drop in land values. He was hail-fellow with all men, from a duke to a labourer, but there was something in his manner and something in his eye which kept both one and the other from venturing on the ground of familiarity. To see him tramp along through the brisk morning air, and to note his erect carriage and his quick

observation, would have made it plain to anyone that his was the kind of sleeplessness which is not due to overwork either of body or of mind, but rather to idleness of a sound brain and an enforced flaccidity of natural energy; for there are two kinds of insomnia, just as there are rheumatism and gout.

Squire Pierrepont had so little business really his own to interest and occupy him, that even now he was not merely taking a walk; he was going to see how young Mr. Coverley was getting on, and especially to know if he was sending any cattle or sheep to that day's market in the neighbouring town Mr. Coverley had for the Squire's eye the fascination of newness and of vice. He was the kind of man that is commonly called "a gentleman-farmer" (whom the ignorant must not confound with a "yeoman"); that is, he was evidently a well-bred, well-educated young man who had "taken to" farming, as he might have "gone to" the Bar, or "into" the Church or the army; and who was bent on farming by new lights, and on trying experiments which the Squire considered risky. The Squire's interest was all the freer that the land with which the young man experimented was not his, but his banker brother's, and all the fresher that he had been little more than a year on the farm; and it was unqualified with anxiety, because the young man seemed to have money to play with. Moreover, the Squire was glad that it had not been necessary for him to dislike the young man, as he had at first been inclined, merely from jealousy of all strangers and interlopers.

The Squire heard the business bark of a sheep-dog, and, divining that Mr. Coverley must be in the dog's company, he made for the sound. He found master and man and dog in a field of cabbages, making selections from a flock of sheep feeding therein, and driving them out into the lane. Mr. Coverley, a stalwart young man, was in his shirt sleeves, laying

hold of and lifting tups and ewes as if to the manner born. On catching sight of the Squire, he left his occupation to the man and the dog and approached. The Squire held out his hand.

"My hand is rather woolly, Squire," said Coverley, hesitating to give his.

"It's wholesome and kindly dirt, Coverley," said the Squire, giving the young man's hand a frank grasp,—more for his own sake than that he had been recommended to his friendly attention by Sir William Pierrepont.

"And are you sending all these sheep to market?" he asked.

"Yes," said Coverley. "I'm thinning the flock out."

"Thinning it out? I should think you are! with a vengeance!" exclaimed the Squire. "Why, you'll only have about ten left to eat up the cabbages!"

"That's just the number I mean to leave, Squire."

"What! the ten righteous, eh? But what's that for?"

"Simply, Squire," answered Coverley, "because I find that, what with New Zealand mutton, Australian mutton, River Plate mutton, and Falkland Island mutton, all sold as English, Coverley mutton has very little chance in the market."

"The deuce it has! But what can you do?"

"Breed no more mutton. I'm going," said the young man, who looked very resolute, and tried to subdue the Squire with his eye, "to grow potatoes and tulips, and hyacinths, and some other flowers."

"What!" cried the Squire, after a moment's labouring consternation. "Turn yourself into a common Cockney market-gardener?"

"I don't know about 'common' or 'Cockney,' Squire; but certainly I mean to turn market-gardener. I mean, that is to say," he continued with an immense enthusiasm and conviction, "to grow

what I believe will pay best on this soil. Look at it. It's almost as sandy as the seashore. I was taken in by it at first. I saw it just after some fine spring showers, and I thought I had never seen better grass; it looked as green and close almost as College turf. Good for grazing, I thought; a fine stock farm. I was mistaken; but it's hard to tell the real character of any soil within a year."

The Squire smiled, laughed a little, and shook his head. "Well, Coverley, try your potatoes, but don't spend all your spare money on manure."

"I shall manure my potatoes up to the eyes," said Coverley doggedly, "and still they'll pay." Again the Squire shook his head and smiled. "Why is it, Squire," quickly demanded the young man,—"permit me to ask this question,—why is it that men like you, Squire, and my neighbour Evelegh there, who have been all your days in the country and on the land, are so slow to try experiments? In every other occupation, experiments and attempts at improvement are made, and approved, every week."

"What!" asked the Squire eagerly, ignoring the young man's question. "Have you been at Evelegh again? And what did *he* say to your potatoes, and tulips, and hyacinths? Laughed, I suppose?"

"Laughed? No," said Coverley. "He was very much offended, as much as if I had been chaffing him on something as serious as his family history."

"And his family history *is* serious," said the Squire. "That farm," and he pointed eastward, "has been an Evelegh freehold for I don't know how many hundred years. It came into my brother's hands a few years ago, for closure of mortgage; and Evelegh has gone on doing so badly that I doubt he must quit."

"It's very sad for him, poor old fellow," said Coverley. "But I think I shall have the farm; I mean"—he stammered, blushing the while—"I have

put it awkwardly—I have laid myself open to be misunderstood."

"You really mean, Coverley," said the Squire, "that you want to get Evelegh's farm? I promised him yesterday that I would go to the bank to-day and try to prevail on Sir William to let him stay on."

"Oh, in that case, do, Squire!" broke out Coverley; "do try to prevail on Sir William! Take no account of what I have said. It's a pity Evelegh can't do better with the farm; but he'll take no advice from me."

The Squire considered him shrewdly and smiled again. Then he said, with a serious face and a light frown, "But what on earth do you want with Evelegh's farm, even if he must go? Isn't this enough for you, with your—your experiments, and your potatoes, and what's-his-names? Of course it's no business of mine, but if I were you, Coverley, I wouldn't plunge."

Mr. Coverley glanced at the Squire as one who says to himself, "Shall I tell him?" He evidently found the Squire's frank and friendly look encouraging; for he turned fully to him, and said, "It's not so much that I want the farm, Squire, but if Evelegh must give it up, I hope I shall have it, lest worse happen. The fact is,—and I tell you this in confidence, if you don't mind,—if I get the farm Evelegh needn't stir from his old home; he can stay in the house and work the farm under my direction."

The Squire rubbed his nose with his finger and looked a bit perplexed. "It's very good of you to think of that, Coverley, but have you sounded Evelegh? He's a difficult old fellow to manage, you know."

"I know," answered the young man. "He's very touchy. I've mentioned it to nobody yet, except you, Squire, and—and—his daughter;" and the young man blushed.

"Oh, Jenny!" exclaimed the Squire. "And she approves. It's a dangerous thing, Coverley, to have confidences with a handsome young woman." And the Squire smiled and looked a trifle sly.

"I mean nothing but what is honourable to the young lady," said the young man somewhat loftily.

"Of course not, sir," said the Squire rather sharply; "no gentleman would. But what would your people say to it?"

"I am so situated in the world," answered Coverley, with a touch of solemnity and sadness, "that I need only consider myself and those I care for."

"Oh, in that case!" said the Squire. "And Jenny *is* of as good stock as any in the county. A Pierrepont once married an Evelegh. She may be a little careless in her confidences with an eligible young man," and again he smiled slyly, "but, poor girl, like my daughters, she has for years wanted the advantage of a mother's care. Well, I hope it will come all right. Now I must be off to breakfast. Good morning, Coverley."

"Good morning, Squire," said the young man. "And—excuse me—all this is strictly between ourselves."

"Oh, strictly."

As nine o'clock struck, the Squire approached the hall with the letter-bag in his hand. He had met the postman, and had saved him the long walk up the avenue. When he entered the hall, his sister and his elder daughter were descending to breakfast, arm-in-arm. He kissed them, and they went into the breakfast-room together.

"Slept well?" he asked, while he sought the key to open the letter-bag.

They answered that they had. "But what about yourself, Robert?" asked his sister, while his daughter saw that the breakfast-table was in order, and arranged some flowers which the gardener had

sent in. "You've had a bad night again," continued his sister; "I can see it in your eyes."

"Well," said he, "I haven't had a good night Where's Adey?"

"Trying to maintain her character for being late, I've no doubt," said his sister, with a searching eye on him. Going close, she said in his ear, "You've been worrying again, Robert."

"No, Louisa," said he, sorting the letters, "I merely took the advice of the psalm—'I communed with mine own heart upon my bed, and was still.'"

"And what came of it?"

"I came to the conclusion that I wouldn't lead such a life as William's for a million pounds."

"That's a tame conclusion, Robert."

"Tame? How?" he asked, turning to look at her an instant.

"Well," she laughed, "it must be tame by now. We've had it between us for at least ten years, Robert; and every now and then you've taken it out, and stroked it, and approved of it. It should really be quite at home with you. What's the matter? A dun?" she suddenly asked.

A rigour of gravity had come upon the Squire's face on his opening a certain letter, and therefore his sister suggested "a dun"; for she was in the habit of saying (and thinking) that her brother had but two "money expressions,"—the one constricted and pained, when he received a formal legal notice of a debt which he was not ready to meet at once, and the other expansive and genial, when he read a petition for help or relief, which he would give his last shilling to gratify, did his sister not restrain him. He handed her the letter; she knew all his business —at least, she thought she did. He opened another letter, and began to read it with his sister's affectionate eye on him. As he perused it, he looked first extremely surprised, then he turned pale, and drew his

brows into a knotted frown, and ended by maintaining the frown. Such an expression was rare on the Squire's kindly face, and his sister certainly did not recognise it as one of his "money expressions."

"What?" she asked, and wondered that he put the letter in his pocket.

"I'm going into town," said he, "on Evelegh's business this morning."

"That means, I suppose," said his sister, "'Ask no questions and you'll be told no lies.'"

"Let us sit down to breakfast," said he.

His sister looked meaningly at her niece, and her niece looked meaningly at her, as who should say, "There's something serious!" Just then Thomas, out in the hall, sounded the gong, a light racing step came along the upper corridor, a white figure fluttered and flew down the grand staircase, several steps at a time, and alighted almost in Thomas's arms. With a *frou-frou* of skirts it flung into the breakfast-room, while Thomas disappeared into the kitchen, saying, "She'll come down a cropper one of these days—she's always a-doing of it." It was Adela, the younger daughter of the house, the acknowledged beauty; though some there were of a calmer, steadier vision, who preferred her quiet sister's looks to hers.

"I've done it!" she cried. "I'm not late this time, auntie—don't say it!"

"Just saved yourself by the skin of your teeth, my dear," said Miss Pierrepont.

"You allowed just two seconds for your hair to be done, I should think," said her sister, with a smile.

"What an eye for neatness you've got, Dolly," Adela replied.

She saluted all three with a family kiss, and then they sat down. It was a bright room (the morning sunlight streamed in on them, and sparkled into radiance on the silver and the china), and it seemed

a pleasant company. It was, at least, a handsome; for Miss Pierrepont was cast in the feminine counterpart of the Squire's own mould, though she had, perhaps, a shrewder eye and a firmer mouth, and the two girls were as fine creatures as the most favoured part of fair England could show. Not only had they good features and beautiful hair (the elder yellow, and the younger russet-red, like that which Titian gives his women), but they notably had also that without which good features are vanity, and so-called beauty but a whited sepulchre—undoubted health, health of body and, one may venture to suppose, health of mind; for the latter is more intimately related with the former than many worthy people are yet fully disposed to allow, in spite of the wise Latin maxim which has been long flaunted before their understandings. The girls were both tall, erect, and shapely, and they bore themselves with that unconscious animal pride which constitutes more than half the charm of health and beauty.

"It just occurs to me," said the Squire, looking at his younger daughter with a considering eye, while she and her sister Dorothy were lightly talking about the entertainment of the night before, "that I saw almost nothing of your cousin Philip last night."

Adela's fair skin was suffused with an overwhelming blush, but she said with self-possession, "No one else saw much more, father, except the Swintons."

"The Swintons?" exclaimed the Squire. "Those people!" And he frowned; for "those people" were *nouveaux riches* from the Black Country who had made their money out of nails and screws or chains and padlocks, and who had settled down in the Squire's serene neighbourhood to vex his soul with their ostentation, and to turn the traditions of the country-folk upside down. But having had his little outburst of petulance, his native kindliness asserted itself in characteristic fashion. "Well," he continued

"I daresay they are not a bad sort of people in their way, though their way is not my way, and I suppose Uncle William and Cousin Philip only wanted to be civil to them because of the size of the Swinton banking-account."

"To spend all the evening with the Swinton banking-account, father," said Adela, "needs another word to describe it than *civility*; I don't know the word—but it's not *civility*."

The energy with which his daughter said that caused the Squire some astonishment, and he looked wistfully for an explanation to one and another of his women-folk. A possible explanation was hinted at straightway by his sister.

"The Swinton girl," said she, "is rather good-looking and ladylike. She talked to you, didn't she, Adela?"

"Yes," answered Adela, making a contemptuous *moue*, "she talked to me a little without saying anything. She's silly. She made me think of a girl I read about the other day—she has just two little ideas rattling in her empty head like peas in a bladder: to say her prayers every day, and to look as nice as possible under all circumstances."

"And excellent ideas they are for a girl!" said the Squire, with emphatic seriousness.

"Oh dear me! What a weary, dull world it is about us here!" exclaimed Adela, with a sudden touch of depression; for, like all the high-spirited, she was peculiarly open to unexpected incursions of doleful dumps. "Did you ever," she asked, suddenly addressing her sister, "hear and see anything so vulgar as that fat Mrs. Swinton? Did you see, papa, how she squawked and made eyes at Uncle William?" She took her table-napkin like a sheet of music, and rose and sang with *empressement*, "Oh, *stee* with me, my darling, *stee*!" And they all laughed.

"Any woman would waste powder and shot of that

kind on William," said the Squire,—"any woman. He's not a marrying man."

"Oh, papa," said Adela, sitting down with a sigh, "I do long to hear good music! If I could hear now the opening of the Ninth Symphony properly played, I should be carried to the seventh heaven, and I should feel—oh, so good!"

"I daresay you would, young lady," said her father. "And that reminds me: I don't approve of my daughter fiddling in public. I had no idea you had your fiddle with you."

"Oh, *fiddle*, papa!" complained she. "Say *violin*."

"I prefer *fiddle*, my dear; it's English."

"But shall we never have a season in London, papa? Can't we go next year?" she asked in a coaxing tone.

"We must wait and see, child," answered her father. "As a rule, I don't like London for young ladies any more than I like hothouses for flowers. Young ladies are best in the country, just as flowers are best in the open ground."

Adela looked at him reproachfully, and then turned again to talk to her sister and her aunt.

Instantly the Squire became absent; while his women-folk talked, his frown supervened on his face. He returned to himself to find his sister's eye on him, and made haste to speak to avert suspicion.

"I can't get poor old Evelegh out of my head, as I saw him yesterday I'm going into the town, Louisa, to meet Evelegh on business; and I was just wondering if one of you would like to drive in with me."

"Oh, I would, papa!" cried Adela at once.

His sister looked at him. She knew, and he knew that she knew, that he had not been truly wondering about a companion at all; she feared, and he guessed that she feared, there had been much more anxious stuff in his thought—but what, she must wait to know; for the Squire, notwithstanding his openness concerning most things, could be as close as an oyster about what he wished to conceal.

CHAPTER II

EVELEGH OF BROCKHAM

IT was market-day, and also the September horse-fair, at East Dormus, which is a considerable place, with two fine churches and a famous bank. East Dormus is nothing if not a market-town, and that day it was seething with men and beasts. The great paved market-square, which is commonly as deserted as Salisbury Plain, was crowded with huddled enclosures of sheep and pigs and cattle and horses, yet not so crowded but that old fellows might shake their heads and declare they had seen it more so. The pavements were tramped by hob-nails, and the tavern bars and taprooms were bewildering babels of talk and laughter, clatter of pewter and clinking of glass, while the yards were filled with all fashions of dogcart, gig, and phaeton. Yet, in spite of the constant perambulation and bustle and jostle, no one seemed very busy, and "agricultural depression" could be read on many a face even among those in the bars and taprooms.

A little after twelve had struck on the clock of the new market-hall (which Sir William the banker had presented to the town in commemoration of the Queen's Jubilee and of his own baronetcy) there appeared on the upper pavement a big middle-aged man in a somewhat worn tweed suit and gaiters, carrying on his arm a horse-rug and in his hand the whip with which, doubtless, he had driven into town. By his side walked a fair comely lass almost as tall

as himself. They were the object of much greeting and of more observation. "How do, Evelegh?" "How do, Brockham?" sounded on this side and on that as they passed slowly through the throng, to which the big man merely responded with a composed "How do?" without stopping. The interest of those who greeted him did not cease when they had passed: they turned their heads and looked after him and his comely and demure companion, saying with easy commiseration, "Poor old Evelegh! That's about the last of him! Turning out of Brockham, I hear! That's a fine girl of his!" At length Evelegh of Brockham was stopped full by an old fellow carrying what Dr. Johnson would have called "a considerable oaken cudgel."

"Sure-lie!" exclaimed the old farmer. "Who'd ha' thought to see you here, Evelegh? 'Tain't oftens as you're on show in market now. It'll be a twelvemonth o' Sundays a'most since I seen you."

"An' more 'n that, Bompas," said Evelegh.

"Eh, but I'd never think as how you was the same fettle young chap as could crook your leg wi' the best of 'em, and sing your song and crack your joke at the ordinary on market-day."

Evelegh's daughter turned her bright, candid look on her father with quick interest, as if to imagine him as he was thus pictured.

"That's more 'n twenty year ago, Bompas," said he.

"Twenty year!" exclaimed the old fellow. "What's twenty year? And now, Evelegh, you look as solemn as a barn-door, and as stiff in the back! Cod! I'm as young as I was twenty year agoo! Seems to me the young chaps now 'ent got no pith in 'em! You stick to the old uns, my gell," said he, turning suddenly to Evelegh's daughter, and letting his old eye sparkle on her. "An old un for me, say you. Come and ha' a drink, Evelegh: 'twill melt the hard tallow in your back."

Evelegh declined. He said he had business to do at Sir William's almost at once, and he must first go to his other daughter's, the schoolmistress.

"Ah," said the old fellow in commiseration, turning and looking at the bank which was known as Sir William's, and which dominated the market-place and seemed to keep watch on it with its hundred Argus eyes, "I've heard something o' that. Bad thing, Evelegh, to get into the Perpont hands. Them kind o' fellows let you run the length o' your tether all round, and then they up wi' the staple and clear you out, and ye've got to find another pasture for yourself, like as it were."

"Well, Bompas," said Evelegh, turning on him the wistful brown eyes of a weary ox, "it ain't quite just come to that yet. It may; but it ain't. I've some hopes o' hangin' on. Next year may be better nor this. And 'tain't settled one way or t'other."

"No banks, nor borrowings, nor mortgages for me," said the old fellow, banging his stick on the pavement. "I banks wi' myself; I borrows out o' my own pocket; and I mortgages to nobody."

"'Tis main easy to say that!" murmured Evelegh. He slowly shook his head, with compressed mouth. He plainly meant that he for one could not find his way through life by the aid of these neat maxims; and the look of his sad, brown eyes added pathos to the meaning, for out of them gazed a simple soul that saw everything and understood nothing.

The two men parted, promising to meet later, and Evelegh and his daughter continued their way as before. They had proceeded along another side of the square, and were about to turn off to seek the abode of Evelegh's other daughter, the young schoolmistress, when out of the chief hostelry of the town, the Pierrepont Arms, came the Squire. He laid his hand on Evelegh's arm.

"Ah, there you are, Evelegh; in excellent time. We'd better go in at once to Sir William."

Evelegh hesitated, and looked at his daughter. "I was going on first, Squire," said he, "to Emmie's at the school."

"I can go on by myself, father," said his daughter promptly, "and you can follow."

"You'd better do that," said the Squire; "for we should take Sir William now. To tell you the truth, Evelegh, my brother wants me to do something for him, and he's likely to be softer before that business is settled than after."

Eevlegh smiled and his eye brightened at the Squire's surprising craft. He handed the whip and the rug over to his daughter, and turned and accompanied the Squire to the bank without a word. His breathing quickened and quavered as he entered behind the Squire, and when he followed into the awful sanctum of Sir William, his face, which bloomed in spite of lines and stains induced by harsh weather and excessive worry, became suddenly an ashen grey. He was but a poor farmer, who had lost his way in life, and was on the point of losing all; he was deeply smitten, and the next half-hour would decide his fate; the chance of recovery, or slow death away from his beloved home and fields, the fields and the home which had belonged to an Evelegh since history could remember.

Sir William received them politely—he was reputed the politest man in all the country round—but with a slight uplifting of his brows at sight of Evelegh. When they were seated, he swept at them a look of expectation, leaned back in his chair, and drummed with his white fingers on his writing-table. He was a year or two younger than his brother the Squire (their father had been both squire and banker), but he looked older. He was not unlike his brother, but thinner, and altogether more alert in appearance and manner; he was clearly endowed with more vigour of brain to knit and inform his shape.

"Well?" said he, with a smile, glancing from his brother to Evelegh.

"I've brought in our old friend Evelegh, William," said the Squire, "to see if something can't be done in his very hard case." There was a touch of brusque challenge in the Squire's tone, as if he defied his brother to say he should not have taken the liberty of interfering; for the truth is that the Squire, though fond and proud of his banker brother, was rather afraid of him. They had never quarrelled, but there existed between them a tacit disapproval of each other's thoughts and ways and tastes, tempered with a good-natured indulgence. The Squire loved the open air and field sports, while the banker was a fireside and library gentleman; he rode little and read much, he entertained frequently queer, learned fellows from London and the Universities, and his amusements were reputed to be of altogether another sort to those the Squire delighted in. Their pursuits lying thus far apart, they were not in each other's confidence, and Sir William could be on occasion very frigid and reserved with his brother. Therefore, the Squire now watched the effect of his interference on Evelegh's behalf with some solicitude.

Sir William shook his head to a degree that was no more than perceptible; but Evelegh's anxious eye was on him, and a laboured sigh quavered forth, and his desperate gaze was lowered to the carpet, to rove wildly over its pattern.

"We've both known Evelegh, William," continued the Squire, "since we were all boys together. We've been neighbours and friends, and his people before him were neighbours and friends—true friends—of ours before us. You know as well as I do that in the old fighting days, whenever a Pierrepont rode out, there was always an Evelegh at his elbow, not by necessity of tenure, but out of friendship."

The pleasant touch of romance called a slight flush

even to Sir William's pale cheek. "Yes," said he; "I've no reason to disbelieve the story."

"Well," said the Squire, aware that he must abandon the ground of sentiment, yet seeing no solid place for argument, "can't we manage to keep him going in the old place? Come now, William?"

"Have you or Mr. Evelegh any means to propose?" asked Sir William. "Any means of keeping him going?"

"Well," said the Squire, feeling that he was advancing a very weak plea, "the prospects of farming may improve,—they're bound to take a turn for the better,—and I'm ready to be security for his next year's rent."

Sir William took no note of the offer of security. He shook his head, and said with considerable energy, while Evelegh listened with anxious ears and eyes, "Agricultural prospects will *not* improve, neither next year nor the year after that; they'll be very much worse before they are better, and you will be ruined and I will be ruined, unless farmers will take up with new methods and try other crops than the old round. I wish not to hurt Mr. Evelegh's feelings, but he knows that he never would have anything to say to new methods or new crops." He did not know—how should he?—that he was tearing up Mr. Evelegh's feelings as with a plough. "So if I were Mr. Evelegh, I should be glad to be out of it all and into something else."

"What! Ruined! and to begin life again when you're over fifty?" exclaimed the Squire. "You can't think what you're saying!"

"I know perfectly what I'm saying, Robert," said Sir William, "and I mean it. I regret very much—I do, indeed, Robert—that it is quite useless to propose that Mr. Evelegh should go on at Brockham. I cannot help it; I am not altogether my own master in it; I have the bank to think of. But," he con-

tinued, after drumming an instant on the table, "it would have been better if I had not entered on this discussion; I ought to have told you at once that I have determined to let the farm to another."

"Do I understand ye, Sir William," Evelegh laboured to ask, "to say that Brockham's let to some feller?"

"Yes, Evelegh," answered Sir William, "Brockham is, to all intents and purposes, let—let to a very good man."

"Oh, I didn't know it was really *let*," said the Squire sharply.

Evelegh did not heed the Squire's words; he was labouring to produce a question. "Brockham's yourn now, Sir William, and av course you've a right to put in the man that pleases ye, but being as it is and as it was, you'll excuse my curiosity to hear the name of the man."

"You both know him," said Sir William. "Coverley, your nearest neighbour, Evelegh."

"Coverley?" exclaimed Evelegh.

"What on earth does he want with another farm?" demanded the Squire, as if he did not know.

Sir William considered a moment, and answered that he did not know—that he probably thought he could easily work both farms together.

"Tenants are bad to get just now," continued the Squire. "I suppose you've had to lower the rent to him."

"On the contrary," said Sir William, "he will pay twenty pounds more."

The Squire frowned. Evelegh was wounded sorely in all ways—in his sentiment for his old home, in his family pride, and in his vanity as a farmer.

"Coverley!" he exclaimed, and his eye was furious with the fury of an exasperated ox. "And does Coverley think he can make it pay twenty pounds more when I couldn't make a living? He hev a

stock of impidence, hev the young man! He comes to me, does the feller, to teach me farming! me as was a farmer, and a good un, before he was got! I ought to hev had a son: he'd hev talked to him! But our breed's going down with the country, Squire; we can't get nothing but slips o' daughters! But I ask your pardon, Sir William. There ain't no use my sitting here, a-talking and a-shouting." He rose to go, and Sir William rose also.

"I am very sorry for this, Evelegh," said Sir William. "I wish with all my heart it could have been avoided; but I believe you'll come to see this wrench was for the best when you get established in some other way of life."

He held out his hand, but Evelegh ignored it.

Rolling his head as if in pain, and staring at the wall, he said, "You should know better nor that, Sir William. You should know, no man better, that you can't transplant a old h'oak, and look for it to thrive. You can't." And, having said that, he marched out without turning again.

After a word to his brother, the Squire followed him. He found him on the pavement, looking out over the seething market-place, with furious eye and heaving chest.

"You're going to your daughter's, aren't you, Evelegh?" said the Squire. "Let me walk a bit of the way with you."

"Thank you kindly, Squire," said Evelegh. "But you've your own business to see to, and I'll not put you to the trouble."

"I can't tell you how sorry I am that I've been able to do nothing, Evelegh." The Squire held out his hand, and a suspicion of a tear was in his eye.

The farmer grasped and wrung it with spasmodic fervour. "No fault of yourn, Squire—no fault at all!"

He walked away, labouring with his emotion: he was mainly a silent, undemonstrative man, and

emotion, when it came to him, came as a terrible upheaval. He took this quiet turning and that till he came, not to his daughter's, but to the entrance of the green, shady churchyard surrounding the grey old Norman church. He pushed through the lych-gate and passed over the lush grass between the graves to a retired spot, near a dense and dusty yew. He stopped by a grave which had an ample, old-fashioned headstone almost covered with lichen and inscriptions. He had come apart there, because the noise and distraction of the market-place and the sight of men and women threatened to make his trouble more than he could bear. He stood amid the peace and silence of the dead, in the golden sunlight of the bland September day, and with fist outstretched, as if threatening heaven, he swore a great oath.

"Never, never! no, never will I forget it!"

What would he never forget? Strangely enough to the careless observer, not the steady refusal of Sir William to have him longer as tenant, nor the doubts Sir William had cast upon his farming, nor the insulting suggestion that he would easily get over his divorce from Brockham, but the unexpected and amazing succession of Mr. Coverley to his farm at an increased rent! The young man had made him wince and smart oftener than once by urging on him in loose, neighbourly talk the adoption of this or that new-fangled notion, but this last—this implication that Coverley could make not only a living but a profit where he, after years of bitter toil and anxiety and loss, had failed with ignominy—was a barbed dart that pierced to the quick of the palpitating mass of his vanity; and the simpler, the kinder, and the more silent the nature is that receives such a deadly wound, the more unforgiving it is, and the vaster is its appetite for vengeance.

When he had somewhat relieved his labouring breast by the registry of that vow, the organ of the

church began to mutter stormily and then passed into a simple, sweet melody. Evelegh became intensely softened by it. He let his eye light on the tombstone, and read the last, the freshest inscription (though he knew it by heart)—"Susannah, the dearly beloved wife of John Evelegh of Brockham," with the touching addition of the sentence common on tombstones, "She lived beloved, and she died lamented." In little more than a week he would cease to be Evelegh of Brockham; he would be Evelegh of Nowhere, and Brockham would know the name of Evelegh no more. The remembrance of his wife and of her tardily perceived virtues of love and patience, charity and cheerfulness, swept over him like a flood, and he went and leaned upon the headstone and wept bitterly—tears that seemed wrung out of head and heart.

"Oh, Susan, Susan!" he moaned. "I never knowed what you was to me! never, never, while you lived!"

The fountain of his emotion finally was exhausted, and with his passion quite dulled, but not dead, he made his way out of the churchyard, and to the schoolhouse, which was but a stone-throw from the churchyard.

Meanwhile, in the little parlour of the schoolmistress's abode, against the window upon which the sunflowers turned their backs, sat two girls, while a third moved about, laying the table for dinner. The sitting two were the Squire's daughter Adela and Jenny Evelegh, and the other was Evelegh's other daughter, Emma, the schoolmistress. Adela had met her father on the way thither and had heard from him that Mr. Coverley had taken Brockham; so now all the talk of the girls was about the young man.

"But what does he want with two farms?" demanded Adela: everyone was asking that. "He might as well want two wives as two farms."

"The case is hardly the same," said the schoolmistress, with a laugh. "He has one farm, but he

hasn't one wife yet," with a glance shot at her blushing sister, of which the lively Adela was not slow to seize the significance, "and then two farms can be joined and made one, and two wives cannot."

"Not unless the one wife eats the other up," laughed Jenny, looking down with a pretty consciousness and putting a stray curl from her smooth, candid brow behind her ear.

Adela looked in surprise from the one sister to the other. "Really!" she exclaimed. "You don't seem much distressed by the news I've brought you! I thought I should have to cheer you up, but it doesn't seem as if I shall have that privilege." She caught a glance of understanding on its passage of exchange between the one sister and the other. "I believe," she said, "truly, I do, that you have known the news all the time, and that you don't mind a bit. Why don't you mind? There's a secret!" she cried, noting again the smiles of the two.

"What a girl you are, Miss Adela," exclaimed the schoolmistress, "for finding out a secret!"

"I had need be," said Adela. "If I didn't find out for myself when I was near a secret, not even my old friends, I can see, would tell me. I claim to know it, Jenny," said she, appealing to the sister before her.

"But the secret is not mine, Miss Adela," pleaded Jenny; "I mustn't tell you."

"Whose is it, then? Yours, Emma?"

"No," answered Emma promptly; "it's not mine."

"Have I ever kept a secret from you like this? Have you ever had to use a corkscrew, as I am now doing, to get a secret out?"

"What about Mr. Philip?" asked Emma archly.

"Oh, Philip!" exclaimed Adela. "I'm never going to speak to him again."

"Oh, why?" exclaimed both sisters eagerly.

"I'm not going to be turned off your secret in that

way," said Adela. "Won't you tell me? I shall think you very unkind if you don't."

"You'd better tell her, Jenny," said Emma.

"I mustn't," said Jenny resolutely. "It's Mr. Coverley's secret, not mine; and he said I might tell my sister, but nobody else."

"I can guess what it is," said Adela, with her eye on Jenny: "he has asked you to marry him, and is going to ask your father, and that's why you don't mind Brockham being given up." Jenny blushed, but shook her head—signs to which Adela gave no heed. "Well, Jenny," she continued, "I think Mr. Coverley is very handsome and very nice; I like him very much."

"He admires you very much," said the ingenuous Jenny; "he thinks you and Miss Dorothy both very handsome."

"It's very kind of him," said Adela, with a tinge of more colour on her cheek and a toss of her head. "But of course he thinks you handsomer."

"Oh no; he doesn't do that," said Jenny simply. "That would be nonsense. But you are quite wrong, Miss Adela, he has not asked me—not yet; I mean, he has not asked me at all."

"But you think he will soon?" queried the inquisitive Adela.

"What have I said?" exclaimed Jenny. "You make me ashamed!" And she turned her face away, covered with confusion, and at length rose from Adela's neighbourhood. "You always entangle me with your talk—you always did. I won't answer any more questions."

"My dear Jenny," exclaimed Adela, rising and laying hold of the ashamed and indignant girl and kissing her, "I don't want to entangle you. Why should you be ashamed of being in love with Mr. Coverley? If I were in love with a man I was proud of, I should glory in it. And if he hasn't asked you

yet to be his wife, I'm sure it's only because he wants to make more money first; and that's why he has taken Brockham."

"You're quite wrong again," said Jenny. "He doesn't need to make money; and his reason for taking Brockham is much kinder and more unselfish and beautiful than that."

"Oh?" queried Adela. But before she could corkscrew any more admissions out of Jenny, Mr. Evelegh entered, looking much as usual, with his round brown eyes and the ruddy varnish on his cheeks. "I'm sorry, Mr. Evelegh," said she to the poor farmer, "to hear that you are leaving Brockham. And Mr. Coverley has taken it, I understand."

"Ay, he hev," answered the farmer: "understand or not."

That morose reply did not encourage her to continue her condolence; so she said her adieus and returned to the Pierrepont Arms to lunch. On her departure Evelegh's daughters sought to take up the subject of Coverley; but they were repelled and silenced.

"D—n Coverley!" he cried, with unusual violence of words and tone. "Don't never speak to me of the feller. Never will I forget what he hev done! Never, never!"

And his daughters looked at each other in amazement and perplexity.

CHAPTER III

IN THE PIERREPONT ARMS

IN the meanwhile, Sir William Pierrepont, the Squire, and Philip, the son of their deceased brother, had met for lunch in a private room of the Pierrepont Arms; for Sir William did not live at the bank: he kept house in a brand-new mansion a little way out on the Pierrepont road. While waiting for the return of Adela, they talked of the sad business of Evelegh of Brockham; and it may be remarked as significant that Sir William's frock-coat, which had been closely buttoned in the bank parlour, was now undone, and that his hands were now loosely thrust into his pockets. His formal politeness was gone, and in its place he had a familiar suavity much more engaging. He was sedulous to convince the Squire that he could not have done otherwise than he had done in Evelegh's case.

"Believe me, Robert," said he, "I'm eager and ready as you can wish me to be to do something for the poor old fellow; but your extraordinary good-nature and your ignorance of business hinder you from seeing how impossible it is to let him continue on the farm. If I only played at being benefactor, I couldn't keep the bank going a single year. As it is, we shall lose nearly a thousand pounds by him."

"So much as that?" exclaimed the Squire.

"As much as that," answered Sir William.

"And his farming," put in the smart Philip, "is the

kind that was in vogue in the days before the Repeal of the Corn-laws."

"Not quite so old as that, Philip," said the Squire.

"Almost," persisted Philip.

"I'm not a greenhorn at farming, remember," maintained the Squire obstinately; "I know something of farming."

"But look here, Robert," said Sir William, laying his hand on his brother's shoulder and shaking him gently, as if in reproach of the stagnant sweetness of his nature. "Suppose I had done as you asked me, —accepted your security for the year's rent and let him go on for the year,—what would have happened? You know as well as I do. With the best intentions in the world, Evelegh would have just done as he has done for years, and you'd have had to find the greater part of the rent. I don't blame him; he can't help it. He is the kind of man that can't learn new games when the bones are set and the muscles are stiff; he can only do what he was trained to do in his youth, and to try to get him to do otherwise would be only to worry and puzzle him and prepare him for a fit of apoplexy."

The Squire looked sharply at his brother. "Apoplexy?"

"That's often how that sort of thing ends with that kind of man. And you must have seen how he has changed in the last few years; how he has grown duller and stiffer, and less able to take up your meaning. Surely it is better to cut the connection now between him and Brockham than after another year's debt, and worry, and heart-breaking. It's being cruel, Robert, only to be kind. It's better, surely, than dragging out his pain."

With such representations, varied and repeated with patience and conviction, the Squire was silenced, and finally convinced that it was best even for Eve-

legh himself that he should be uprooted and torn from Brockham at once.

Sir William was visibly relieved and gladdened by the Squire's reluctant conversion to his own view; for, as will presently be seen, very much depended on the Squire's being satisfied with the justice and, above all, the propriety of Sir William's conduct.

"Now let us sit down to lunch," said Sir William; "it's getting late."

"But we must contrive to do something," said the Squire, "for poor old Evelegh."

"Of course we will," said Sir William.

Adela entered when they had sat down to lunch, and she recounted something of her interview with the Evelegh girls.

"Humph!" said the Squire, eyeing his brother. "It's evident that everybody is not meant to know why Coverley has taken Brockham, and at a higher rent too."

"But a 'kind, unselfish, beautiful reason,'" observed Philip, "sounds like uncommonly bad business."

"Ah, that's a nut for you to crack, Philip," said the Squire. "Certainly, however, a higher rent should be good business for you, William; for, between you and me, the farm is not worth the old rent as prices run now."

Sir William did not answer; he seemed brooding on his plate.

"And I can't help guessing, father," said Adela, "from Jenny's behaviour, that his beautiful intentions have a good deal to do with Jenny herself."

"Why, you don't mean," exclaimed Sir William, suddenly waking up and showing a keen interest, "that he is thinking of marrying the girl?"

"And why not, uncle?" demanded Adela, ruffling her feathers to fight for Jenny. "Miss Evelegh is a farmer's—a yeoman's—daughter; she is handsome

and well-mannered; she is very much above her class; she is my friend."

"To be your friend is enough to account for all the rest," said Philip, with a smiling bow across the table.

Adela stared at him as if he were a rude stranger, and continued, ignoring his over-done compliment, "Mr. Coverley is handsome, too, I suppose, but, after all, he is only a farmer."

"Mr Coverley," said Sir William hastily, "is a college-bred gentleman with a taste for farming."

"Oh!" exclaimed the Squire in some surprise; "you know all about him, then?"

"I know about him," continued Sir William, with a quick flush over his pale face and with more measured speech. "I have acted for him a long while, and I am sure his people wouldn't like such a marriage."

"I always thought Coverley a gentlemanly fellow," said the Squire with interest. "Is he of Sir Roger's family, or of the Yorkshire Coverleys?"

"I think," answered Sir William, after a moment's hesitation, during which he looked troubled, "you shouldn't ask me that, Robert."

"Humph!" murmured the Squire, with a hard mouth. "Bar sinister, I suppose."

"No, Robert," answered Sir William slowly; "I think not. Indeed," he added, as if putting compulsion on himself to make the asseveration, "I'm sure not."

It was to be remarked, during these passages of dialogue concerning Coverley, that Sir William, who was commonly the least embarrassed of men, kept his eyes on his plate or on his glass. The frank and simple Squire seemed to take no note of that, but the quick-eyed Philip did.

"The young farmer's origin," said he, "appears to be like Thackeray's Jeames's, 'wrop up in a mistry,' uncle."

Sir William shot at him a keen, suspicious glance, under which the young man's gaze fell.

"I hope, uncle," said Adela warmly, "you won't try to part him and Jenny. They're very fond of each other, I believe, and it is quite refreshing in these days to know, or hear of, a pair of faithful lovers."

"Is faithful love so rare nowadays, then?" asked Philip, with another smile.

"Very rare indeed, sir," answered Adela, with acute point; "especially among men."

"Highty-tighty!" exclaimed the Squire. "What's the meaning of this?"

"I'm completely in the dark, uncle, as to everything," said Philip, "except that Adey seems to wish to snap my head off." He knew that his cousin disliked to hear that name from any mouth but her father's.

She cast on him a look of high contempt. "It is usually thought low," said she, "to make up by rudeness for want of understanding."

"Come, Robert," laughed Sir William, "let us have a glass of port in my room, and leave these two to get to the bottom of their mutual want of understanding."

"What?" demanded Adela. "Isn't he wanted at the bank to hatch the Swinton golden egg?"

"Oh, that's what this means!" exclaimed Sir William. Then, stepping up to her and laying his hand kindly on her shoulder, he said, with great seriousness, "You are a very jealous young lady; there may be little harm in that when there is good reason. But remember, my dear, your uncle tells you this—a banker, like a politician, may have to say and do many things which he would shrink from saying and doing merely as a man."

Adela was flaming, and furious with herself for having so plainly exposed her feeling. But she was not subdued, and sharpness was still on her tongue.

"Do you mean, uncle," she asked, with an air of simplicity, "that a banker can't be a gentleman?"

"That, my dear," said Sir William, shaking his head and his finger at her, "verges on the rudeness of which you complained a moment ago."

"I beg your pardon, uncle." She caught his hand, rose impulsively, and kissed him.

Sir William linked his arm in his brother's, and they passed out together.

The two young people left continued to sit on opposite sides of the table. Philip leaned on his arms, with his glass in his hand, rolling round and round in it the dregs of his claret. He glanced at his cousin, and it occurred to Adela that a stranger would call his face hard and his eye sharp. She was given to speak upon impulse, and experience had not yet schooled her into reticence; she now without hesitation uttered the thought as it rose clothed with words.

"Why don't you grow a beard?" He was close shaven. "It would hide your mouth."

"Does my mouth need hiding?" the young man asked, with a blush which he tried to pass off with a smile; for his glass and the world in general conspired to give him the belief that he was handsome.

"Don't you know it does?" said she. "It's expression is hard," she continued, "harder than you know, perhaps. But the hardness disappears when you smile."

"Well," he answered, smiling again, "I'll let my beard grow to please you, Adela."

"Oh, don't do it to please *me*!" she exclaimed, crimsoning.

"Very well," he said; "I'll do it to improve my appearance."

"That's as you like."

"As I like?" said he. "No, cousin, it would be in obedience to your suggestion."

She began to be aware that the person who attacks upon impulse is at a great disadvantage with the calm person who can parry each thrust and cut, without yielding to the temptation to thrust and cut in return; and the knowledge made her angry and impatient with herself. She was shrewd enough to perceive that she had given her cousin good reason to suppose she had a quick interest in him, when her desire had been to make him think she did not care twopence for his regard.

"Suppose," said he, still smiling, "that we try, as uncle suggested, to come to an understanding."

"About what?" she demanded, affecting haughty unconcern. "What is it necessary we should have an understanding about?"

Again he looked at her with that thin, indulgent smile, which kept her anger and impatience at boiling point. "I have gathered," said he, "from your behaviour to me during lunch, Adela, and from what you have said, that you do not approve of my taking any notice of the Swintons. Perhaps I am wrong?"

"Quite," said she promptly. "Why should it matter to me to whom you may pay attention?" she asked triumphantly.

"Indeed, why should it?" he said, with a sudden show of serious humbleness; and she foolishly presumed she had vindicated and established her indifference.

"It cannot matter to me," she added in confident recklessness, "whether you pay attention to the Swintons, or anybody else; though it may matter to your own reputation." In her satisfaction with herself for having got that said, she did not see she had given the alert Philip opportunity for a deadly *riposte.*

"In that case," said Philip, plunging his hand into the inner pocket of his coat, "you can advise me,

Adela. I received that note this morning—from Miss Swinton."

Before Adela could utter a word of protest, the note was laid open before her. She blushed crimson, and then gazed down at the writing and glanced up at him, uncontrollably pale with a sudden ghastliness. He still maintained his look of serious humility.

"Read it," he commanded, "it contains nothing private."

She dropped her eyes again upon the note,—she could not help it,—remarked the gilt monogram "M.S." and the thick, smooth quality of the scented paper, and then devoured with furious eagerness the plain writing—

DEAR MR. PIERREPONT,

You said you are fond of lawn-tennis. Won't you come to-morrow evening and have a game, and dine with us afterwards, quite *sans cérémonie*?

Yours faithfully,

MABEL SWINTON.

"The absurd, ill-bred, shameless thing! with her school-girl French phrases!" cried Adela, blazing with anger. "If she wants you to visit their house, and to play tennis, why hasn't she the decency to ask her father or her mother to invite you? She's a vulgar, designing minx!"

And before Philip, or even she herself, was aware of her destructive intention, she had torn the note up into pieces this way and that, and was stamping them on the floor.

"Oh, Adela!" said Philip in a low voice, more of amusement than of reproach.

She looked at him; he was smiling, with a sparkle of mischief in his eye and a touch of triumph about his lip; and she understood that he had purposely entrapped her into that demonstration.

"I hate you, Philip! I hate you!" she cried, stamping her foot. "You are cold, and hard, and

mean! Don't smile in that superior way! Don't! it gives you a horrible mouth!" And she turned away and burst into tears.

What could her cousin Philip then do, being a man, with at least a man's pity for a weeping woman, but rise and offer the fondest cousinly consolation? But he misunderstood Adela's emotion. She wept neither for jealousy of Miss Swinton nor for vexation with herself, but because of the outrage she had wantonly done to her native sense of maidenly propriety. Philip's attempted embrace nerved her to recovery of herself.

"Don't, please," she said, putting her cousin's arm away with the quiet dignity of self-possession.

She looked at him neither with anger nor with scorn; she looked at him not at all; but dried her eyes, put on her hat and jacket, and went out—followed, somewhat awkwardly, by the subdued and puzzled Philip.

Adela walked to the bank to find her father. Philip stepped by her side, and she did not forbid him; she merely took no notice of him. He tried to catch her eye—he uttered an unimportant word or two to induce her to speak, but she went on as if she neither saw nor heard him; which, if you think of it, is rather embarrassing conduct in a young lady whom you are attending as squire. Philip held the swing door of the bank open for her to enter; she passed in without a word, and on into the outer parlour, followed still by Philip. A clerk sprang forward, fearing they were about to penetrate farther; he addressed himself to Philip.

"Sir William has the Squire with him, sir. He gave orders that he was not to be disturbed on any account—not by anyone."

"The Squire is busy," said Philip, turning to Adela with a smile, glad of the new opportunity to make her break silence. "What will you do?"

"I shall wait here," said she to the clerk. "I'm in no hurry;" and she drew to her the local newspaper and began to read the advertisements.

"Very well, miss," said the clerk.

Philip seemed to think he had done what he could to purge himself of offence, and with a slight shrug he left her and went to his duty; and Adela sat and heard as in a dream the serious tones of her father and her uncle. She overheard no word said; but even if she had overheard, she probably would not have guessed the supreme importance to herself and her family of her elders' conversation.

CHAPTER IV

IN SIR WILLIAM'S PARLOUR

WHEN the brothers entered the banker's sanctum, Sir William had produced from his private store a bottle of Cockburn's old port, two glasses, and a box of cigars. Sir William had taken occasion then to remind his brother of the port they had drunk in their youth at the famous Cock Tavern by Temple Bar, and also of certain escapades they had indulged in together in London, when they were supposed by their parents (by their mother, at least) to be engaged all the while in serious study at Cambridge.

"Yes, I remember, William," said the Squire, sipping his port, "I remember. We were mad, both of us, about Kitty Clare. Dear, dear! And our last turn in town together was just before your row with our old father about Cousin Philippa. That tiff we have just seen between my Adey and Philip has made me think of it again."

At that mention of Philippa (who was still unmarried, and who maintained an eccentric seclusion in an old manor-house on the skirts of the town) Sir William was more obviously disturbed than when Mr. Coverley had been talked of. It was plain this time that a painful memory had been touched. For a second or two he looked ten years older, and then with an effort he threw that effect off.

"Well, Robert," said he quickly, tossing off his

glass, "I hope Philip won't make my mistake. I ought to have married Philippa."

"I never understood why you didn't, William," said the Squire; "you both seemed fond of each other."

"Don't speak of it, Robert. A young man's folly and madness which he must rue for ever! What is it the Bible says?" he suddenly asked, with a hurried, forced attempt at lightness. "'A fool is wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason.' Wonderfully wise things in the Bible! It is an awful thing in life," he exclaimed, changing immediately to a desperate seriousness, "that you can never get away from the effects of a—a mistake! Never! It is worse than an error in figures, that once made is bound to run through all your books! But you can go back and correct that, and carry the correction through; you can never correct the other! Never!" The Squire looked both pained and puzzled; he was no reflective philosopher; he took things in life as they came, without pondering either before or after. "Well, Robert," resumed Sir William, recovering his usual manner with his brother, "I didn't marry Philippa, and here I am." And he spread out empty hands.

"Yes," said the Squire; "there you are, a lonely bachelor, William."

"I didn't quite mean that, Robert," said the baronet quickly, pouring out another glass for his brother and for himself. "I mean this," gathering himself for an effort of resolution: "if I had married Philippa, Philippa would not have drawn her capital out of the bank,—to put it heaven knows where,—and I would not be under the necessity to-day of appealing to you in a difficulty, Robert."

"Oh yes," said the Squire, knitting his brows in anxious expectation; "that's what you wrote to me about this morning. But why didn't you speak of it

last night? Didn't like to, I suppose? Nothing very serious, I hope?"

"I won't lessen the seriousness of the difficulty, Robert, as many a man in my position would," said the banker, with unusual warmth and emphasis; "and the plain, disagreeable fact is this—if I cannot arrange an accommodation I am thinking of, Pierrepont's bank must close its doors in a fortnight!"

"Good heavens, William! Pierrepont's stop payment, that used to be thought as safe as the Bank of England? Man alive! how has that come about?" The Squire gripped the table to steady his dizzy amazement.

"Very easily," said Sir William, keeping a tight mouth, "at a time when confidence has been shaken in the Bank of England itself. The fall of prices all round, in land and in produce, has driven us into business of a kind we didn't use to touch—business of a more speculative sort. There is plenty of assets—abundance of assets—that are sure to improve in value if we can hold on to them, but that could only be realised now at a ruinous loss. Do you follow me, Robert?" For the Squire was gazing wildly at the map on the wall.

"I follow you, William," said he. "But if Pierrepont's stops payment, there's not a man-jack in the county but will be hit!" and the Squire's ruddy cheek grew pale with horror of the widespread ruin that would be wrought.

"Hardly a man," assented Sir William.

"And there's not a Pierrepont of us could hold up his head in the county again!"

"The family honour is deeply engaged," said Sir William. "That's why I have ventured to set the condition of things before you."

"I don't reproach you, William," said the Squire; "I can never belabour a man when he is down. I suppose you couldn't help getting into this mess.

I've always believed in your knowledge of business, and I do still, William."

"Thank you, Robert," said Sir William, extending his hand to his brother, who grasped it in brotherly affection.

"Well, now, what is it you've got to propose?"

"If I can tide over the next two months, I can see my way, but to tide that time over I must have a sum of money in a few days."

"How much?"

"Thirty thousand."

"Phew!"

"I can borrow it from a London bank," said Sir William quickly, "in my own name, with yours to back it."

"Oh," said the Squire, with an uncontrollable effusion of relief, "if you only want my *name*"—

"My dear Robert," said Sir William, with a sudden flush of feeling, and perhaps an alarming touch of compunction, "I know you are one of the best and most generous men in the world, and I won't let you do merely upon impulse what you might regret when you came to think it over. You quite understand," he insisted as with an effort, "that it is for the borrowing of a large sum I want you to back me? and that if within the stipulated time I fail to fulfil my engagement on it, they will come upon you?"

"Quite so," said the Squire almost gaily. "But of course you'll not let anything of the kind happen? You'll be all right in a month or two, eh?"

"I hope so; I think so," said Sir William, with an attempt at confidence; "and in any case," he added, with free resolution, "I'll take care that neither you nor yours, Robert, shall lose anything by this, though Pierrepont's may break and I be ruined."

"Oh, come, William," said the Squire quite gaily, pouring himself out another glass of the Cockburn port, "Pierrepont's will be all right now. I was afraid,

you know," he added, with a flourish of a laugh, "that you wanted me to find a large sum—a round million or so—for you at once, and I didn't see how that was to be done, except by marrying an American heiress."

"I believe, Robert," said the banker, with unaffected feeling, "you'd have tried to do even that!"

"Tried? yes!" said the Squire; "if it had been feasible! You quoted a Bible saying to me a minute or two ago, and now I'll quote you another—'A brother is born for adversity.' I should think so, indeed. When a man's back is at the wall, if his brother is not by his side, human nature and family feeling have come to a pretty pass."

"I'm deeply grateful to you, Robert, and I'll never forget it."

"Say no more, Will, say no more; but tell me what's to be done."

It was arranged that they should travel together to town next day on this business, and then the Squire rose to depart. In the outer sanctum he discovered his daughter poring over a railway time-table.

"What, Adey!" he exclaimed; "looking out a train to elope by?"

Adela rose, covered with a blush. "I was passing the time till you had done passing the port, father."

"Been waiting long?"

"Not very."

"Had a satisfactory talk with Philip?"

"Quite."

"That's just as it should be. Well, now, I think we'll go home, my dear."

When they were gone, Sir William called the bank messenger to him, and instructed him to go out and find Mr. Coverley—either at his inn, or in the market, or anywhere in the town—and bring him to the bank.

"He can't have gone home yet, I should think," said he, and retired to his inner room.

He put away the Cockburn port and the cigars in their receptacle, and then he sat down at his writing-table. His hands lay idle, his thoughts wandered, and the lines about his mouth sank into the stern expression of a nature that has long battled in secret with strong emotions. As he thus sat, he now and again opened and immediately tightly closed his lips, and shifted in his seat, as when a man says to himself, "Let me not think of it!" Of what did the banker-baronet desire that he might not think? What disturbing or painful memory arose that he would rather forget? "Surely not a crime," you would say, while you considered his apparent kindliness, respectability, and probity; "perhaps only a lesion of conscience or of fortune which he takes too seriously." But who can truly judge? For, while the best are less good than we commonly profess, and the worst less bad than we are inclined to believe, there are few who, on looking over the book of their life, do not come upon passages that make them blush, or compel them to cry, "O wretched man that I am!" They would gladly blot these paragraphs or chapters with the blackest of Indian ink, and they are glad when they read them that the world is not looking over their shoulder.

Sir William had sat thus for some time, when Mr. Coverley was declared to be waiting without.

"Show him in," said he, and sat up ready braced to receive the young farmer.

By all the ancient rules of writing Mr. Lionel Coverley ought to be a hero; for since the opening of this story his name has been continually in the mouths of divers people, and his doings have been discussed with more or less of eulogy, while he himself has not appeared till this very moment, except in an informal, undress fashion. His public appear-

ance would thus seem to have been heralded enough for him to be a demigod, a prince, or at the least a conquering commander, and his entry should be accompanied by the music of pipe and tabor, and by the tramp of a warlike host. Needless to say that his entrance into Sir William's parlour was accompanied by no sound save the firm tread of his own stout boots; and when he stood in Sir William's presence, there appeared nothing particularly heroic about him. He looked "manly, sir, manly," in his well-fitting riding-suit of Melton cloth, with gaiters of the same; he showed himself of goodly height, without being notably tall; well-knit and muscular, long in the leg, narrow in the flank, broad in the shoulder, and deep in the chest; he was not a young lady's hero, for there was neither pink nor white in his complexion; he had clearly never considered the proper decoration of his mouth with hair (he wore merely a small ridge of whisker on his square jaw), and his hands had not disdained hard work; nor was he a mother's hero, who is too frequently a prig when he is not a hypocrite; and yet he was always kindly regarded by women, for there was something singularly winning and wholesome in his appearance. He had a strong, humorous mouth, and a bright, well-opened hazel eye, sane, intelligent, and tender in its expression; and when one thinks of it, is it not strength tempered with tenderness that unaffected women naturally turn to most?

Sir William rose to receive him with a singular effusive graciousness, and with an approval and admiration of eye closely akin to affection.

"I sent for you, Lionel," said Sir William, entering on business at once, "because I thought we had better settle that Brockham matter out of hand."

"Quite so, Sir William," said Mr. Coverley, leaning forward, with his elbows on his knees, ready to enter into the matter.

"Evelegh has been here with my brother, asking to let him stay on."

"Oh yes, poor old fellow!" said the young man. "And what did you say?"

"It was rather painful," said Sir William, "but"—he pitifully shook his head—"what could I say?"

"Of course," said the young man, "what could you? For him to go on farming Brockham, according to his poor old notions, would not only ruin himself completely, but the place as well. No, poor old fellow, he's proud and stubborn, and it'll be a wrench for him; but it needn't be so much of a wrench, and he'll be far better with the responsibility off his hands."

Sir William had a quick ear for tones and for the choice of words. He glanced sharply at the young man, who, with his elbows still on his knees and his eyes lowered, was tapping his boot with the handle of his riding-whip; what did Lionel Coverley mean by the curious turn of his last sentences?

"I don't quite understand," said Sir William, slyly regarding his bent head, "why you have been so anxious to get Brockham; I should have thought the Holly Bush farm was enough for your energy, especially since you have been there not quite two years."

"You don't object, Sir William," said the young man, quickly raising his head, "to me as a tenant for Brockham?"

"Certainly not," Sir William made haste to say; "for you've done very well already with Holly Bush. But I should have thought, I say, that the one farm would have been enough for your energy."

"It's not a very big farm," answered the young man; "and I have a very deuce of energy in me; you've no idea," he laughed.

"Well, you know," said Sir William, "I heard today, on what I must regard as credible authority,

that you had a very 'beautiful' reason for wishing to have Brockham—'beautiful,' I think, was the word."

Gazing through a blinding blush, Coverley demanded, "Who told you that?"

"It was my brother's daughter Adela who told," said Sir William; "but she had it, I believe, from Evelegh's daughter;" and he smiled archly.

Coverley blushed again, and looked down before he replied. "If it's talked of like that," said he, "I may as well tell you the truth about it. I have a house already at Holly Bush; I don't want two houses; so I thought that if I had Brockham, the Eveleghs needn't turn out at all, and Evelegh could stay on and work the farm under my direction."

"Under your direction?" exclaimed Sir William, and slowly shook his head.

"Oh, I think I'm capable of directing him," said the young man, "though he has a hard mouth to manage."

"I don't doubt your ability," said Sir William; "I only doubt Evelegh's willingness. You may as well expect to train a hog to plough as think that Evelegh will accept any position under you on what has been his own farm. My dear boy, I don't wish to discourage your kind intention to the stubborn old fellow, but I'm afraid you don't know Evelegh very well. You've heard, of course, that the Eveleghs in the old days used to ride in battle with the squires of Pierrepont, not among the following, but at the Squire's elbow?" Coverley intimated that he had heard the story. "Well," continued Sir William, "they kept that up to the very last. Eighty years or more ago, when all the country was afraid of Buonaparte's invasion, the yeomanry here were up, like the rest, riding and drilling. The Squire, my grandfather, was colonel, and this Evelegh's grandfather was a trooper; but he would insist on

breaking the rule of discipline by riding in what he reckoned his place, at my grandfather's elbow. My grandfather, who was an irascible old gentleman, ordered him to fall in among the troopers. He refused, saying his rightful place was where he was. 'You must fall in with the rest, Evelegh,' said my grandfather, 'or be put under arrest for disobeying orders.' 'I'll neither fall in nor be put under arrest,' said Evelegh; 'but if you're game, Squire, I'll fight you for my place!' and he whipped out his sword and defied them all. The end was that Evelegh rode home and put off his uniform, and never put it on again. And that's the Evelegh temper."

"That must have been a fine old fellow, sir," said Coverley with enthusiasm.

"Yes," said Sir William, "but his story does not promise well for the docility of the Evelegh disposition under direction."

"No, sir," said Coverley; "but I think I can manage it: believe me, Sir William, I know what I am about."

"You expect, perhaps," ventured Sir William, with a smile, "to manage or coerce the father through the daughter?"

The young man cast a bright glance at the senior, and blushed again; but "Perhaps" was all he said.

"Having confessed so much, Lionel," said Sir William persuasively, "you might go a step farther. Believe me, I'm interested in the matter far more on your account than on Evelegh's."

"You are very good, sir," said Coverley.

"It has been hinted to me that you are paying court to Evelegh's daughter: may I ask if that is true?"

"Quite true," said the young man.

"And do you intend to marry her?"

"I have not asked her yet; but I certainly intend to marry her," answered the young man.

Sir William was evidently very much disturbed. He moved the papers, the pens, and the ruler near his hand before he spoke again. "Miss Evelegh may be a very nice, good girl,—my eyes tell me she is handsome,—but she must be extremely ill-suited to be the wife of a gentleman by birth, education, and prospects."

"Meaning me?" said the young man, flushing and uttering a short laugh of self-derision.

"Meaning you."

"Then, Sir William," said Coverley calmly, but with a kind of vicious firmness, "let me say that I had not expected to hear you utter such stale nonsense—excuse me—at this end of the nineteenth century. Permit me, sir, one moment. You must know as well as I do that when a gentleman of healthy instincts and unsophisticated by the tricks of society seeks a mate, he marries a woman, and not a lady. I mean the question of rank and other rubbish does not occur to him if she suits and pleases him."

For an instant Sir William looked ghastly pale. "'Pleases him' only, you should say, my boy," he resumed, with a gentle sadness: "you should omit 'suits.' For a woman or a lady to 'suit' depends upon many things that have nothing to do with sentiment."

"Ah," said Coverley quickly, "I *thought* you imagined me a sentimental fellow, whereas I pride myself upon my common sense."

"When we are young," said Sir William, still gently, "we always think our sentiment the sublimest common sense. But sentiment is at war with all the conventions of the world, which—permit me one moment—are not ignorant and foolish prejudices, but are deeply based on the experience of mankind, and contrived for human happiness on the whole, and for the easy working of our social economy. For one marriage of the kind that is called a misalliance that

turns out happy and fortunate, ninety-nine bring misery and ruin. I speak very seriously, my boy, because I know it: I have seen it. If you marry this girl, what will happen under the most favourable circumstances? You will have children, and she will become a household drudge to keep them and the kitchen up to the mark—for the easy days of farming in England are past for ever; she will lose her figure and her looks, and in a few years she will be a poor creature you will wonder you ever looked at."

"And what shall *I* be?" demanded the young man, with a smile curling at the corner of his mouth, but grim seriousness in his eye. "Let me put my picture alongside my wife's. I shall be a hard-worked farmer, up at dawn and asleep, or at least sleepy, at dusk,—for, sir, as you have said, the easy days of farming in England are past for ever,—with scarcely a thought to give to my wife, and no time to open a book except to nod over it. In what way, sir, shall I find my wife wanting if she performs her duties as a drudge?"

"There is no reason at all," said Sir William, breaking his gentle calm at last, "why you should be a farmer, no reason whatever, except your self-will!"

"No, Sir William," said the young man; "and so we come back to the matter which I thought was dropped for ever two years ago." He neither spoke loudly nor angrily; but there was a strange force in his voice which seemed to agitate the air like a breeze, and the breeze seemed to affect Sir William like a thunderstorm; for he was pale and amazingly agitated, and he pushed the papers, pens, and ruler about in an exceedingly flurried fashion. "Who am I to aspire to marry even a poor farmer's daughter? I do not believe I can call the name I bear my own. I have neither father nor mother. Who am I? Even poor bankrupt Evelegh may refuse to let me marry his daughter, and you tell me she is beneath me, and

bother me about my being a gentleman by birth and education! Who am I? A nameless fellow, who can only take to the soil, because the soil is the birthright of every son of Adam!"

Sir William was so agitated that he rose from his chair and walked to the window, and back again to his chair.

"You are a gentleman, Lionel," said he, "born in lawful wedlock, that I can assure you;" but the assurance seemed to cost him some effort and pain.

"If I am, sir," said the young man, "where are my parents? Who are they—or were they? Let them claim me, if they live, and I shall listen to them."

"If," said Sir William in a hurried rush of words, after an instant's hesitation,—"if I make this known to them, they—or your father at least—will probably claim you. Will you promise me to wait till then before marrying this girl?"

"Wait till they have had an opportunity of speaking? Certainly," said the young man. "Are you not well, sir?" he asked in acute alarm; for Sir William was nodding and nodding his head in acceptance of his assent.

"Quite well," said Sir William, recovering something of his normal manner with a strong effort. "But the time has passed quickly. I think you had better go now. I will see about the lease for Brockham. Look in upon me when next you are in town."

CHAPTER V

PIGHEADEDNESS AND THE COMFORT OF LOVE

"NOW what have I said," quoth Mr. Coverley to himself as he left the bank (with Philip's curious eye on him), "what have I said to upset him like that?"

He was ill-pleased with himself. He was painfully impressed with the patent fact that he had much disturbed the banker, towards whom he had only the kindliest feelings, and he was worried that he could not understand why the banker had been so disturbed. He valued an equable life himself, with even pulse and open eyes; he believed it one of the greatest disservices one could do a man to unsettle that condition, and he reckoned himself a fool for having somehow blundered into performing such disservice for Sir William.

But he was young and healthy, and by the time he had mounted his horse (a hunter) to ride home, that feeling had passed. He had discovered at the inn-yard where Evelegh had put up that he and his daughter were gone; and he rode away with good speed and intent to overtake them. He had ridden about three miles, when, on climbing the ascent that rose from the old mill, he descried on the top of the hill, between him and the sun, an antiquated gig which he guessed to be Evelegh's. He turned his horse on the turf by the roadside and galloped up with muffled thud. He recognised the heavy and depressed shoulders of Evelegh and the erect and charming

form of Evelegh's daughter, which sent a warm gush to his heart. He was but a little way behind the jogging gig, when Jenny, whose ears were sharper than her father's, and whose attention was less embarrassed, turned her head. She saw who was coming, and at once shook her head with a pretty frown. She then took her poor, worn little umbrella, and her father's whip, which lay idly before her, and raised full in Coverley's view a rude letter X, which Coverley judged to mean that her father was "as cross as two sticks." He therefore did not join them, as he had intended, but hung back and dropped behind, and finally turned down a bye-way, passed them, and so rode home without the refreshment of converse he had proposed to himself.

Later, however, after he had eaten a meal and smoked a pipe, he resolved to walk over to Brockham and make his proposals to Evelegh. He took the way by the fields, with his dog at his heel, and, with the easy conscience of a benevolent man, knocked at Evelegh's door. The door was opened by Mrs. Sumner, a widowed relation of the farmer, who with Jenny formed then his entire household. The widow, who had been wont to greet him with the effusive friendliness of a fat, loving nature, received him somewhat coldly, and without inviting him in, went to the parlour and announced his presence to the farmer.

"Coverley?" he heard the farmer say. "What does he want? But ask him in."

The words, coupled with the widow's coldness, made Coverley wonder uneasily; and so it was with something less than his usual frank good-humour that he entered Evelegh's presence. It was plain to see that Evelegh was in a condition of fume and of deep offence, to which (it is probable) only his ancient sense of hospitality restrained him from giving free course: he could not quarrel with a man in his own house.

"Take a chair," said the farmer, and Coverley sat down, while Jenny, with her eye, pointedly invited Mrs. Sumner to sit down also; for the stout widow was hovering at the door in obvious anxiety and alarm. "Hev a glass of ale?" added the farmer; but he did not get another glass, nor did he move the ale-jug towards his guest.

"No, thank you," said Coverley, with an involuntary flush of resentment. There was a pause of embarrassment. "I have just come in, Evelegh," said he, "on a matter of business." He had not intended to plump into business at once: he had meant rather to approach it gradually and diplomatically; but what could he do when he was thus received, and was not helped even with a word.

"Well, say on," quoth the farmer, stolidly sucking at his long clay pipe without noting that it was out; "I'm a-listening."

Jenny contrived to create a slight diversion by exclaiming, "Your pipe's out, father. Let me get you a light." She got him a light, and the incident could be no further prolonged; but she managed to give the young man a powerful look of appeal, as if she would say, "Oh, don't, don't be angry with him!"

"I believe you've heard, Evelegh," said Coverley, with a trifle more ease and cheerfulness, "that I've taken Brockham."

"Ay, I hev," said the farmer, "I *hev*!" He was agitated evidently by a deep fire of passion, for his pipe trembled in his fingers, and his voice vibrated like the boiling of a pot, though no emotion showed through the deep, ruddy stain of his cheeks.

The young man debated with himself an instant: should he remark Evelegh's anger? or should he ignore it? His frank nature prompted him to take note of it.

"You seem angry with me, Evelegh," said he, "about that, or something. What is it?"

Evelegh took his pipe from his mouth and glared on the young man as if he were on the point of giving vent to his passion; his daughter's hand was involuntarily raised to be laid on his arm in restraint; but her father restrained himself without consciousness of that hint. "I don't want to be oncivil to you, young man, in my own house—as *is* my own for a week or so yet—but what hev you come for? What hev you come for, I asks you? Is it for to see how I take it?"

"Oh, Evelegh! Really!" exclaimed the astonished Coverley.

"Well, young man," continued the farmer, without heeding the exclamation, "I don't take it lying down! and I won't! There! And you can put that in your pipe and smoke it!"

"Why you should think that of me," said the dumfounded young man, "I can't for the life of me guess! Have I ever shown myself an enemy?"

"Shown yourself, young man?" exclaimed the farmer; and then he went on with what he evidently considered a clear exposition. "An enemy, as is what you may call an enemy, don't show himself no more than an adder till he bites. You'll tell me you ha'n't bitten? What's going behind my back, and taking my farm, and at a higher rent?"

"Going behind your back, Evelegh?" cried the amazed Coverley.

"I call that 'biting,' and 'enemy.' Mebbe you don't. There we differ!" And he sucked furiously at his pipe.

"But your farm was in the market, Evelegh!" said Coverley, restraining his impatience and resentment. "Another man was after it,—young Bompas,—and I offered more rent to get it, hoping to be your friend!"

"'Friend!' sez he," quoth the farmer, truculently addressing the old oak secretary on the side of the room remote from Coverley. "'Biting,' says I, and

'enemy'!" Then, turning his eye towards Coverley, and showing very much of bloodshot white, "Don't you bring no such friending here! I warn you."

Coverley was sore vexed, angry, and bewildered. "Really this is"—he began, letting his patience go, when he caught the glance of Jenny's beseeching eyes, with tears glistening in their corners; then he said to himself, "Poor old fellow! He is mad, he is stupid, and he has only one thought in his head, which needs a great deal of driving out; I must drive it out gently." He then set himself to make a narrative of his negotiations for the farm, and Evelegh listened with the white, suspicious eye of a vicious horse, snorting now and then a "humph!" of disbelief, or interjecting an impatient and rapid suck of his pipe. Coverley perceived his narrative was not an enlivening success; but he continued steadfastly, setting forth his purpose in what he had done, and, in order to avoid the impressive appearance of conferring a favour, he contrived (as, I regret to say, nine shy, honest Englishmen out of ten would have done) to invest his statement with something closely resembling (to a morbidly sensitive ear) haughtiness and insolence.

"I thought, you know, Evelegh," said the young man, "if you cared, you might stay on, and—and work the farm under me, you know; I must have someone, you see, to manage for me; and then you needn't turn out of the house here,—I don't want two houses,—and you might all three be very happy, with the trouble off your shoulders."

Now Evelegh was both proud and sensitive, and his failure as a farmer had intensified to the point of disease these harmless and invigorating qualities. He listened to these last well-meant, but awkward sentences from Coverley as if he could hardly believe his ears. He gazed with round eyes, with his pipe

out of his parted mouth, and then he consumed Coverley's carefully cherished hope in a blaze of resentment.

"Well!" he exclaimed; "of all the impident fellers! You *hev* an impidence! *you* hev! You actially hev the bareface for to propose that I should take service wi' you! here on my hown place, as was! Be your hodd man, where my family hev lived for hundreds of years! Practise your new tricks in farming! grow parsnips for horses, and feed calves on cheap cocoa stuff! It's CHARITY you offer me!" And he brought his heavy fist down on the table and made everything rattle. "You, because you fancy yourself as a gentleman, and well-educate! you chuck me CHARITY! 'Evelegh,' sez you, 'I'm your friend!' And you chuck me that, like a bone to a dog! D—n your friending! Take yourself and it off, afore I forget myself! Let me be, gell!" for Jenny had laid a trembling hand on his arm to restrain and calm him. "It's adding *hinsult* to *hinjury*! *hinsult* to *hinjury*!" and again he thumped the table. "Now go! and don't make me oncivil in my own house!"

Coverley rose, pale and stiff with pain and indignation. But still, for Jenny's sake, he maintained his patience with the stupid, furious old fellow.

"I'm sorry, Evelegh," said he, "that you so misunderstand me! I hope you will think better of it in a day or two!"

Evelegh said no more, and Jenny with tearful eyes silently implored Coverley to go. But there was another who was resolved not to let the matter end thus even now—Mrs. Sumner, who, being a woman, had more practical sense than her relative, and who, having seen many troubles, understood a kindness, however awkwardly it might be offered.

"Oh, Mr. Coverley," she cried, laying her hand on

him to detain him. "To think that you, that mean so kind and good by us, should be blackguarded like this! And, oh, John, but you hevn't got no sense for yourself nor for anybody belonging to you! You're that contrairy, that obstinate, that pigheaded, that you think you know everything, and you don't know nothing!"

"Being my cousin's widda, Susan," said Evelegh, "you belong to me in a sort o' way, and I must put up wi' you. But I wouldn't hev your soft, silly head-piece, woman, no, not for a hundred pound! Now you just go into the kitchen, that's your place, and never you name this to me again!"

Poor fat Mrs. Sumner, whose energy of opposition was already exhausted, went out with a sigh of "Oh, deary, deary me!" and Coverley went out after her.

But he had not gone far when he was overtaken by Jenny. She clung to him, weeping and trembling. She kissed his hands and patted and stroked his breast and his arm in a passion of distress; and Coverley bared his head in involuntary tenderness and respect for her agony.

"Oh, my poor, good, beautiful dear!" she cried. "To be so dreadfully treated by my father! And how sweet and patient you were with him! If you never spoke to one of us again, I couldn't complain! No! I shouldn't be surprised if you could never forgive us!"

"Poor old man!" said Coverley, suffused with love and forgiveness. "I don't really mind what he says. I think his troubles, preying on him, have made him crazy. He has somehow got it into his head that I'm his enemy, and we must just patiently try to get that idea out."

"Oh, my dear! my dear!" exclaimed Jenny, weeping still. "How good, how good and kind you are! But you had better leave us to ourselves! We will

only bring you worry and trouble, and—and expense! And I'm afraid it's me has led you wrong! I've made you think that father would be glad to stay on here under you! I understood so well what you meant myself, that I thought he would be sure to understand! And now he won't listen or understand at all!"

"We must give him a little time," said Coverley. "Now, Jenny, compose yourself, and let us see what we can do. It's not like you to be so overcome as this."

"No," said she, standing off a little and smoothing her hair back, but still holding his hand. "It was the way you were treated that went to my heart, till I think it would have burst if I had not run out. But I am better now."

"There's a good girl," said he; "my own girl, kind and brave!"

"Lionel," said she, raising his hand and trying to plait its fingers. "I'm afraid I'm not the girl you ought to love; I'm afraid I'll bring you nothing but ill-luck! Oh, try and love some other girl, please, and don't think of me any more!" But still she clung to his hand.

"Jenny, my sweet dear," said the lover, stroking her head, "do you *wish* me to try to find some other sweetheart?"

"Oh, I think it would break my heart if you did! But I want you to be happy, and I'm afraid you never will be happy loving me!"

"Then, Jenny," said the lover, "it will be greater happiness to me to have any amount of what you call trouble and ill-luck in trying to make you happy than it would be to be comfortable and easy with the richest and most beautiful woman in the world! The people who are happiest, Jenny, are not the people that have least trouble, but those that love most! I love you, Jenny, more than I can say;

you are my own chosen girl; and you love me, eh?"

"Oh, yes, yes!"

"Well, now," said he, "this is how I'll manage your father: I'll go to him and say I love you and want to marry you, and then he *must* see I'm not his enemy, and he'll be ready to do anything for a man who is going to be his son-in-law."

But Jenny emphatically shook her head. "You don't understand. My father wouldn't be like that at all. If you said that to him just now, like enough he would curse me and turn me out."

"And if he did?" demanded the ardent lover.

"Oh no!" she cried. "I couldn't do that, Lionel! Poor father, I can't leave him like that! I shall never leave him till he is friends with you."

"At anyrate, we shall always love each other," said he, "and presently I will make your father friendly and comfortable in spite of himself; I can be as obstinate as he is. Do you think I mind what he said to me to-night? Pooh!"

And Jenny sank her head on her lover's breast with a tremulous sigh, and was held close in his arms. He stooped to kiss her on the lips, and beautiful, ripe, warm lips they were.

"If you do that again, Lionel," she whispered, "I'll pinch your ear." And forthwith she did pinch his ear. "Haven't you got nicely-shaped ears, and beautiful, crisp-curling hair? I wish you weren't Mr. Coverley of some great family somewhere. Why do I always forget you are a gentleman, and only think of you as my own dear—mine?"

He answered her in the only possible way. And thus, with the touch of love, which is so thrilling, and the babble of love, which sounds to alien ears so foolish, but which to the speaker and hearer is so sweet, these two forgot for a little while their wounds and cares. They stood under an old aspen-poplar.

The leaves seemed to cease their rustling flutter to hear the words of love which are so old, but yet ever new; and the sparrows asleep on the boughs woke up to chirp softly and confidentially among themselves, and to listen and look at the lovers below.

CHAPTER VI

SOLD UP

IT is possible—nay, likely—that many of my readers are somewhat tired of hearing so much of so stupid and obstinate a person as Evelegh; but his stupidity and obstinacy were so massive and enduring, and his wrath against Coverley so unfalteringly suspicious, monstrous, and revengeful, that he affected far more than a clever person might have done the destiny of others. Therefore it is absolutely necessary that he should be observed a little longer and understood a little better.

It had been agreed between Jenny and Coverley that she should try to soften her father, reason lovingly with him, and incline him to Coverley's design for his own comfort. Patiently and gently she tried for a day or two, by distilling soft, affectionate, and wheedling words in his ear, to melt and move his stolid obstinacy; she pleaded with him to consider Mr. Coverley's proposals for her sake, for his own sake, for all their sakes; till at length he broke his own silence to silence her by saying, "What's come to you, gell? Seems to me you're infatiwate about the feller! Sure-*lie*, you might leave that to silly Susan!" (meaning Mrs. Sumner). "Now, not another word to me about him, if *you* please!" So Jenny's attempt failed. Furthermore, Coverley did by letter what he had meant to do by word of mouth on the memorable evening of Evelegh's outbreak—offered to take over the farm stock, implements, etc., at a

valuation, to save Evelegh the trouble and expense of a sale. To that the old farmer merely replied on the instant, in his heavy yeoman fist—

SIR,—Postlethwaite has my orders to sell on the — instant. You can come and bid with the rest. That's fair.

Baffled but not defeated, east down but not in despair, Coverley was yet determined to do something for his sweetheart's father before he left the farm, for a time only, the young man hoped. He would go to the sale and run up the bidding as much as he could, and he would set someone else on to buy for him certain cherished heirlooms among the household furniture, which he could then present to Evelegh without being suspected of being the donor. Out of delicacy he did not impart these two crafty purposes to Jenny—a delicacy which wrought him some discomfort and danger, as you shall hear; he merely let her know he meant to attend the sale.

The day of the sale arrived, and Evelegh was up betimes to say farewell to Brockham for ever. He opened the front door and stepped out into the cool dawn; and he thought, with a hard lump in his throat, that he would never see the sun rise precisely over the end of the Downs again. He walked out upon the green and set cackling the watchful geese. He turned to view the old dwelling-house of Brockham, with its steep red roof, spotted here and there with lichen and tufts of grass, which Evelegh now regarded as tenderly as we regard a mole or freckle on a much-loved face. "Evelegh of Brockham!" he muttered to himself, and wondered vaguely what he would be called now by men at market. He swore to himself that he would never go to market; he would keep to himself and his family, and wear out his remainder of life in the little house he had taken by the station, unknowing and unknown.

He continued his farewell round of stable and byre,

field and meadow, followed by his old sheep-dog, who, with his hanging head and drooping tail, showed, the careless observer might have said, more emotion than his master. But yet the apparent apathy of the poor man was surely more pathetic than would have been a violent display of emotion. That day had been stealing on John Evelegh for nearly twenty years; he had seen it coming, disguise it as he might, and the fear of it and the effort to stave it off had drawn the sap from his life, the warmth from his heart, and the nimbleness from his understanding. Does anyone sufficiently consider how terrible, how slow,—slow and almost imperceptible as the processes of Nature, —the approach of bankruptcy must be to a farmer? He cannot, as another man can, toil night and day to avert ruin, to make money by some means; he cannot push this thing forward one week and delay that another; none of his business will make haste for all his praying; he is more the servant than the controller of Nature, and she will hurry or change none of her slow ways for him, nor give him heat nor cold, rain nor shine, according to his need; she will give him nothing and do nothing for him except according to the inscrutable mystery of her own eternal laws. Let us pity John Evelegh; he had been tried beyond most men who know trial; and if trial had not made him a Job, no man of woman born can blame him.

His farewell tramp at an end, he returned to the house, and sat down with his daughter and Mrs. Sumner to breakfast. It was not a cheerful meal. Evelegh was morose and silent, Mrs. Sumner sniffed, and Jenny looked pale and unutterably sad. The meal was hurried through, and then each went their several ways; for there was still much to do to prepare for the sale. Especially were there trestle tables to be set out in the barn, loaded with eatables and drinkables for the refreshment of those who came to the sale; that was a concession to old custom which

Evelegh would not have omitted though it had cost him his last penny.

It was about ten o'clock, a few farmers had already arrived for the sale, and Jenny was casting her eye over the refreshment tables to see that all was in order, when she was startled by a male hand taking hers. She turned; it was Mr. Coverley.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, with a laxative shiver of pleasure. "How you did make me start!"

He gave her hand a fervent pressure. "I just want to ask you if there is anything I can do to help without getting in your father's way?"

"Oh yes," said she; "you might be in here when the first part of the sale is over, and see that things go properly, if you don't mind. Some men seem just to try how much they can eat and drink. I've seen them at other sales;"—and she sighed;—"they seem just to go for what they can put inside them."

Coverley promised he would be there; and then, with another warm pressure of the hand, lest spying eyes should see him if he ventured on a warmer embrace, he slipped away, saying, "I'd better not meet your father, and I've seen him about." He kept himself as much as possible out of sight until the sale was about to begin—"ten for half-past." When he saw the redoubtable Postlethwaite, auctioneer and valuer, sipping his first glass of brandy-and-water, he came forward. When he appeared, Postlethwaite gave him a pointed nod, as to a man of consequence.

"Just arrove in time, Mr. Coverley," said Postlethwaite. "A fine day and a good company, as George there said to Molly when he got her behind the haystack." He threw that morsel over his shoulder to the men in moleskins or smocks and clayey boots and leggings, who looked up to Postlethwaite as the wisest and wittiest of men, and who now laughed consumedly and dug elbows into each other at his joke about "Gearge." "Oh yes," con-

tinued Postlethwaite; "we'll have what I call a good sale with so many rich fellows about;" and he squeezed out a wink to the moleskins and smocks. "Got a catalogue, Mr. Coverley? No? John, give Mr. Coverley a catalogue. What a dashed fool," he whispered, going closer and putting his mouth into as confidential contact as he dared with Coverley's ear, "Evelegh was not to settle with you without a sale."

"Yes," said Coverley; "I made him the offer. But perhaps he was right. He may get high prices among his old friends."

"High prices?" exclaimed the wise Postlethwaite. "Fellers like to get things as cheap as they can, old friend or no friend. But prices! Evelegh knows nothing of prices now. What d'ye think? It'll be four or five seasons ago he sold a fine bull-calf for £10, when I could have got £60 or £70!"

"How was that?" asked Coverley.

"He forgot, or didn't think it worth while to remember, its father was a pedigree bull! I'm afraid he's going here;" and Postlethwaite tapped his own lumpy and crumpled forehead and pursed his thick lips. "But there—we must begin."

"Sale to begin, gentlemen!" bawled his clerk.

To those unused to such scenes there would have appeared no immediate sign of attending the summons. The scattered groups still continued the loud, heady political wrangle in the open, the enjoyment of some rare and secret joke at the stable door, the reflective prodding and scratching with sticks of the old sow, and the slow fumbling and shaking of some machine to test its joints; but the practised observer would have noted an outward look, a turn of the leg, a straightening of the back, which implied that the farmers were preparing for business in their own slow way of Nature, by remote hints and signs. The clerk evidently understood that; he did not shout again. Slowly the groups loosened and drew

towards Postlethwaite, but with a singular resistancy, as if ashamed to begin the game of bidding and buying.

To enumerate the items and the progress of the sale would only weary the reader. Coverley, in his desire to serve Jenny's father, frequently bade for things he did not want, in order to run up the price. As the sale proceeded, he grew puzzled to note how everything for which he made a bid was knocked down to him, and to observe the odd, sidelong looks of his neighbours. He had never before been to a sale in that district. Sales were a dissipation among farmers, as theatres and music-halls are among men in large towns, and Coverley was a young man who minded his business and did not care for dissipation. In a sense that was a pity; for he had thus missed learning the time-honoured practice of the district at such sales, which was this: The incoming tenant held aloof, even as the outgoing did, a tacitly established rule of conduct derived, it would appear, by a sense of justice from an older rule that the incoming tenant should have all advantage. Conceive, then, what general opinion was forming of the young man who (apparently) bade so greedily for almost everything! He himself began to see that, somehow, his endeavours were defeating his purpose, and therefore he made his bids fewer and slacker. Of course, his neighbours thought that the reason of that was because he had got all he wanted. And in truth he had—almost. There was but one item in the first part of the catalogue which truly interested him,—"A Thoroughbred Mare with Foal,"—and it was the last.

He turned away to ruminate a little, and to paint pleasant pictures to himself of what he would do when he had overcome the unfriendliness and obstinacy of Jenny's father; though, like Alnaschar in the Arabian story, he had unwittingly endangered,

and was about to destroy, the possible fulfilment of his dreams.

Alas, poor young man! How would he have been stricken and dismayed could he have seen what was passing in the kitchen of the house at that very moment.

Evelegh sat with a crumpled, dirty catalogue and a stump of pencil in his hands, making some calculation which moved him very much, while his daughter and Mrs. Sumner stood over against him with surprise and grief written on their faces.

"The—the blackgyard!" exclaimed the poor farmer, beating his knee with his hand in the helpless fashion of relieving pain. "Fifty pounds if a penny! —lost!—wi' his bidding and bidding! We en't likely to hev so much but he might hev let things bring a price among the neighbours."

"Perhaps," Jenny ventured to say, "he doesn't know the way of these parts."

"Don't know?" exclaimed her father furiously. "And why don't he know? What for is he a farmer here if he don't know? Trust him to know!"

"I wouldn't hev thought it," sighed Mrs. Sumner. "Deary dear! How you may be deceived!"

"I don't believe it!" cried Jenny. But she could not trust herself to say more; she was involved in wonder and perplexity.

It was nearly twelve o'clock when the last item of the outdoor section of the catalogue was reached, and Mr. Coverley resumed his station near the auctioneer. It was unfortunate for the purpose he had set before himself, namely, to run up the bidding to Evelegh's advantage, that he was inordinately fond of horses, and proud of his knowledge of them. When the mare, accompanied by her foal, was trotted in before the auctioneer, Coverley for the time forgot his sweetheart and her father—everything but the handsome pair. What a graceful, deer-like creature

was the foal! How the mother stood staring round her and trembling. How clean and elegant were her limbs! What spring and speed were in the long pastern and the fine muscle in the thigh down to the hock! What spirit in the erect head, and in the tail, which did not hang limp and nerveless between the hips, according to the habit of most equine tails, but which had the drooping, elegant curve of an ostrich feather! There was but one thing Coverley did not like about her—her head was somewhat too large and "carty" for the best breeding.

"Is there a pedigree?" he asked, out of sheer interest in the mare.

While the auctioneer was consulting Evelegh as to that, an old fellow from another district, who was a horse-fancier, and who was reputed to possess the fastest trotter in the whole county, stepped forward and lifted the mare's forefoot to tap the frog. She swung her head viciously round and seized the most obtrusive part of the man's person. He dropped on his hands, and everybody laughed; it was the best joke of the day. The old fellow resumed his erect position rather sulkily, and turned away with, "*She* en't no good. *She* en't no good," he repeated, as he resumed his place and rubbed the dirt off his hands on her glossy coat. "And, as the saying is, if you want to know what *he'll* be, ax his dam; so *he* en't no good nayther."

"Is there a pedigree?" Coverley asked again.

"Mr. Evelegh tells me, gentlemen, there *is* a pedigree, but he has mislaid it;" and the auctioneer made a grimace aside to Coverley, and murmured, "Like him, ain't it? Trot her out again, Tom."

"Pure?" asked Coverley. "I don't like her head, you know; there's no breed in it. How old is she?" He stepped forward and seized her by the nostrils and the nether lip to look into her mouth.

"Four year old," said Postlethwaite.

"Four?" exclaimed Coverley. "She's seven if she's a day!"

The situation was becoming rather awkward. The crowd seemed to think that, after all, the young man was too curious in his inquiries, perhaps only showing off his knowledge, since it was almost certain the pair would be knocked down to him if he made a bid.

"A bid! A bid!" cried some.

"Fifty pounds," said Coverley, returning to his place with a frown. Had not a man the right to know what he was going to bid for, especially in the matter of horseflesh?

"Who's the young un by?" demanded the old fellow whom the mare had treated with ignominy.

"'Catastrophe,'" said the auctioneer.

"'Catastrophe!'" exclaimed Coverley. "'Catastrophe' is a 'roarer'!"

"All right," said the old fellow; "never mind. Fifty-five pound."

"Sixty," said Coverley.

The old man shook his head and bade no more, and all the rest were silent; so the lot was knocked down to Coverley.

"Worth a hundred and twenty," said the auctioneer, leaning forward as he left his station.

"I know," said Coverley; "they've been knocked down for too little. But why didn't they bid up?"

"Why didn't they bid up?" echoed some. "He, he, he! There's a good un! 'Bid up!' sez he."

Coverley was puzzled and hurt. If they had been knocked down to him cheap, how could he help it?

There was an interval before the sale of the household furniture should be proceeded with, and the crowd sauntered off to the barn for refreshment, with the air of going nowhere in particular. A few walked to the barn with a directness which was reckoned to show very bad breeding. Of these, one was Coverley, who thus deepened the unfavourable impression of

himself which he had given the crowd. He was, of course, only hastening to fulfil the promise he had made to Jenny.

He went to a round of cold beef and began carving it, to the relief of several who stood around, but who looked vaguely about, ashamed to help themselves.

"It's a good cut of beef," said he cheerfully.

"Ay, but it's not for you."

Coverley turned and saw at his elbow Evelegh, with his rough head bare, and with the look of an infuriate ox. Evelegh seized knife and fork from his hands, and Coverley was too deeply smitten with amazement to be angry.

"Oh," said he, "I only wanted to help."

"'*Help!*' sez he! And '*Friend!*' sez he!" cried Evelegh, rolling his eyes round and flourishing the knife about the steel. "There's more loss in your helping and friending than in other folk's thieving! I want no help nor friending from you! I hev telled you afore, and I tell you again."

A rigid, painful silence prevailed; no mouth said a word for Coverley, but all eyes were fixed on him. Anger and mortification swelled his heart to bursting, and rose to his head. Why should Evelegh use him thus?—and before all these men? But he observed how the old hands trembled in the use of carving knife and fork, and pity swelled again above all other feeling.

"You'd better let me do it for you, Evelegh," said he; "your hand shakes."

Evelegh took that as an insult, which was all the more unendurable that it was quietly given. He turned furiously upon the young man and threatened him with the knife.

"Now, you go! or you shall hev this! You've no business here!—not till to-morrow! Come to see how I take it, hev ye? Well, you see! I don't take it lying down!—and I won't!"

There were murmurs of "Brayvo, Evelegh! Brayvo, Brockham!"

The word caught the old man's ear, singing with fury. "Ay, Brockham! Brockham en't yourn yet! And mark my words—it won't be long yourn when you've got it!"

"Father! Oh, father!" It was Jenny who fluttered in between them. She turned, appealing with eyes of shame to Coverley. "Go away, please! Don't anger him! He's not himself!"

"Ay!" cried Evelegh. "You're the one to side wi' the feller! You'd better keep him company!" She laid a trembling hand on her father's arm and gave him a glance of entreaty. "Well, then," said her father, "go into the house wi' you, and don't come meddling here!"

"You've insulted me, Evelegh," Coverley could not refrain from saying; "but you'll know better before you've done with me, and at your daughter's request I'll go."

He went out in a swelling, choking ecstasy of rage, pity, and love, and came upon Timmins, the Squire's butler.

"Timmins," said he, "you're the very man I want. Take this catalogue, and go to the sale of the furniture, and bid on my account for everything that's put up —everything! It's to keep them for Evelegh I'm doing it," he said, now scorning secrecy, "and he shall know yet I'm his friend. But if you let out you're bidding for me, I'll—I'll never forgive you, Timmins!"

CHAPTER VII

THE MAN WITH THE BLANK COUNTENANCE

AT the sale of the furniture of the Brockham farmhouse, Timmins bade with such zeal that he soon attracted general attention, and being recognised as the butler of Squire Pierrepont, it was assumed he must be bidding for the Squire. And since it was well known that the Squire and Evelegh were attached to each other, and that the Squire could not need any Brockham furniture for Pierrepont Hall, it was presumed he must be buying it to present again to its original owner. The Squire was audibly praised for "a kind-hearted gentleman," and his presumed design was contrasted with the recent conduct of the unfortunate Coverley. Poor Coverley! he seemed doomed to be denied understanding and credit on all hands.

Meanwhile, the Squire was still in London with his brother, the banker-baronet. Had he been at home, he would probably have attended the Brockham sale, and by his frank counsel have saved Coverley from the mistakes which he made and himself from an agreeable imputation of generosity.

It becomes necessary at this point that I should for a little while divert the attention of my readers from the country to London. Sir William's visit to London was more prolonged than he had anticipated; for the business he had gone upon was not so easily accomplished as he had expected. Money was "tight" at the time, and more than one big bank declined to entertain Sir William's proposals for a loan. The time

therefore hung somewhat heavy on the hands of the brothers; but yet Sir William refused to amuse himself with such distractions as were available. When he was not engaged in the City, he kept himself secluded in the quiet hotel off the Strand where he stayed with his brother, or in the club of which he was a member. The Squire, who had not been in London for years, and who was less *blasé* than the banker, took the occasion for amusement with the delight of a schoolboy. He liked the bustle of the streets, the sight of the shops, and, above all, the crowds at the theatres, which had just opened wide their doors for their autumn season. On the eve of their departure he tried to prevail upon his brother to go with him to see a comedy about which all theatre-goers were talking.

"I don't believe we've been to a theatre together, William," said the Squire, "since we were at Cambridge, and were so mad, you remember, about that wild little burlesque actress, Kitty Clare."

"I never go to the theatre, except in Paris, now, Robert," said the banker. "I don't like English plays, and I don't care for English acting."

"I call that deuced unpatriotic, William," retorted Robert. "And I think you might for once stretch a point and go, just to keep me company, and to let us have a laugh together on our last night: I hate either to laugh or to dine by myself."

Sir William reflected that it was to serve him his brother had come to London, and that therefore some indulgence was due to him. So finally he yielded and went.

It was a fatal concession.

The brothers sat in a stage box. Towards the end of the first act of the comedy a minor character, a middle-aged duenna, entered upon the stage. At the sound of her voice the brothers started, and Sir William quickly cast his eyes on the programme.

"Surely," said the Squire, "that can never be Kitty Clare?"

"Mrs. Stonebridge," said the banker quietly; but his face was ghastly pale, though the Squire did not note it.

"Mrs. Stonebridge—yes," said the Squire, looking also at the programme. "No, of course; that dreadful raddled woman could never have been the lovely Kitty."

But it certainly was singular, as the Squire thought, that the woman, having once let her eyes light on their box, did not take her gaze off it through the remainder of the act. At its end the brothers went out into the lobby. Sir William refused to return to the box; he did not care for the play; and, moreover, he did not feel well, and he begged his brother to withdraw with him. But the Squire declined.

"No, William," said he, deeply offended; "I'll see the play out: it amuses me. I have not had the advantage of comparing French plays, and this is good enough for me."

"I came to please you," said Sir William; "come away to please me,—to oblige me."

"I tell you what," said the Squire: "if the next act disappoints me and you both, I'll leave after that, if you'll stay for it."

But Sir William would not stay, and the Squire would not go.

At the end of the play the Squire walked to his hotel, followed by a big man who had watched him out of the theatre. When the Squire entered the hotel, the big man approached and addressed the porter.

"Is not the name of that gentleman who has just gone in, Stonebridge?" he asked.

The porter scrutinised the big man, but saw nothing but a great wall of blank, clean-shaven countenance. "What?" asked the porter. "Are you a 'tec and want to lag him?"

"No," said the big man, with solemn sonority and

precision; "I'm an actor" (he sounded the "o" in "actor" *ore rotundo*). "It occurred to me that the gentleman was an old friend of mine named Stonebridge."

"You're mistaken," said the porter. "They're great swells—him and his brother, Sir William—up from the country on business."

"Ah, Sir William," said the big man meditatively. "Sir William *what*?".

"Peerpoint," answered the porter.

"Oh, ah!" said the big man. "Thank you. Very much obliged, I'm sure."

Next morning, when the brothers were at the railway station taking their tickets for home, a big man with a blank wall of shaven countenance got in their way. He begged their pardon in a voice of sonorous precision, and went to the third-class ticket window. A few minutes later they observed him enter a third-class compartment of the train by which they were about to travel. By express train it is not a very long railway run from London to East Dormus, and Sir William Pierrepont and his brother the Squire reached the town before lunch. It was market-day, and they left the station in a tolerably large company of travellers. The two brothers lunched in the Pierrepont Arms, and so did a big man with a blank wall of shaven countenance. The banker and his brother lunched well in a private room, but the big man took his lunch at the bar of bread and cheese and country ale. After lunch the Squire drove home in the trap that had been sent for him, and Sir William went to the bank. He had barely entered his private room when a clerk tapped at his door, entered, and said, with a doubtful air, that a man, a stranger, wished to see Sir William. It was market-day (as I have said), and Sir William expected to be very busy until the closing of the bank.

"Ask the man his business," said Sir William.

"I have, Sir William," said the clerk, "and he says

he can only disclose it to yourself." The young man said that in an apologetic tone, as if conscious of the extreme irregularity of such insistance.

"Tell the man I am very busy, and I cannot see him unless I am first able to judge of the importance of the business he comes upon."

The clerk departed, but returned in a few seconds, looking more apologetic than ever. "He says, Sir William, he has come on behalf of Mrs. Stonebridge."

"Mrs. Stonebridge?" echoed Sir William. He said no other word but that, uttered no other sound, but the effect upon him of hearing that name was as that of having seen one of the fabled Gorgon women who turned men to stone. He was, however, under the curious eye of the clerk, and he quickly came to himself and spoke. "Show him in."

Let no man say he understands the meaning of Time until he has experienced such a half-minute as Sir William endured between the departure of the clerk and the entry of the man. A celebrated student of the phenomena of dreams has noted that in the infinitesimal space of time between the explosion of a pistol at his sleeping ear and his waking up, he dreamt the full story of a quarrel, a challenge, a meeting, and a fatal shot. Would not the phenomena of highly-excited states of waking emotion show results almost as extraordinary? In a few seconds of acute horror and dread, cowardice and courage, Sir William saw pass before him, not in wild, blurred phantasmagoria, but in clear, sharply-bitten, selected scenes, instinct with life and passion, his history for the last five-and-twenty or thirty years: folly and generosity, mad love and as mad loathing—all now rounded off with mocking visions of exposure, disgrace, and ruin. Should he bow or not to this unexpected something that threatened like an assassin's knife? Should he fight or run away? When the man entered, he could not judge from his look which he had better do; for the

man was big, with a great wall of blank, shaven countenance, and his manner was neither cringing nor threatening.

"Take a seat," said Sir William, and the man sat down. "You wished to see me?"

"I do, Sir William," answered the man, and his eyebrows came down and went up with mechanical regularity, "on behalf of my sister, Mrs. Stonebridge."

"And who," said Sir William, with great self-control, "is Mrs. Stonebridge?"

The question affected the big man oddly. A spark of human interest gleamed for an instant in his eye, and a watery smile of intelligence faded over his face; evidently he thought this promised to be as good, or better, than many a "fat situation" in which he had played in all his war-paint. A moment, and he was again the acting automaton with sonorous voice and mechanically moving eyebrows.

"Mrs. Stonebridge, Sir William, is the wife of a gentleman calling himself Mr. Stonebridge, who married her in London six-and-twenty years ago. She has seen little of her husband—extremely little—since the first month or two of marriage, but she has received through a London solicitor a certain small yearly income. We have now discovered that the gentleman calling himself Mr. Stonebridge is—in fact, is a very great swell, and my sister claims to take her rightful position as his wife,—as, indeed, Sir William, *your wife, Lady Pierrepont!*"

The big man, the actor, showed a marked approval of the style of his own speech as a stage deliverance, and looked for its effect upon Sir William. Sir William gave no sign, but considered the man again, and tried to determine whether he was a fool or a rogue.

"You are eloquent, Mr. ——?" said he.

"Clare, Sir William,—a tolerably well-known actor."

"You are an actor," continued Sir William, trying him, "and therefore are liable to arrest as a rogue and vagabond by any justice of the peace."

"I presume you are a justice of the peace, Sir William," and there came a slight expression of dogged truculence on Mr. Clare's blank wall of countenance, "and I venture to recommend you to try the effect of arresting me."

"Your coming here," said Sir William, changing his venue, "looks extremely like an attempt to extort money on false pretences."

Mr. Clare's reply was the production of a letter from his inner pocket, which he handed to Sir William. Sir William took and read it. He knew the hand only too well; it was his wife's. It was ill-written and ill-spelt, but out of the mass of verbiage of reproach and threatening one statement stood out clear; his eyes went to and fro upon it again to make sure he had read aright, but there could be no doubt of her meaning: she had found him, and she did not mean to let him go; she would arrive in a day or two to assume her rightful place as Lady Pierrepont, or, since that might after all not amuse her very much, she would take in lieu of that position £10,000. £10,000 or be Lady Pierrepont; that was her ultimatum!

Sir William's thought and feeling went to and fro; he could determine nothing till the owner of that waiting, watching wall of blank, shaven countenance was gone from before him; and it was time he was gone, or the whole bank would be wondering why an unnotable seedy stranger should be closeted so long with the chief.

"I must consider this," said he, putting the letter in his pocket; and then, to keep the man quiet and to disarm any suspicion he might have that he was being played with, he added, "I suppose the money would be preferred?"

"Very much, Sir William," answered the man promptly. "We have a theatre in our eye." And there was a triumphant twinkle as from the blank face of a toad.

"Oh, you have?" said Sir William. "Well, I have many things to do, and I must dismiss you now. Come back in two hours, and I may have something to say to you." The man rose, but there was no telling from his countenance what he thought of his dismissal. "Stay," said Sir William; "do you drink?"

"I do, Sir William," said the actor, with solemn sonority; but his dull eye kindled with expectation.

"Then I advise you not to go drinking, nor talking, during the next two hours. Ah!" he suddenly exclaimed, for he thought he heard Mr. Coverley's voice in the outer office, and a new suggestion came to him. "Have you any objection to my putting you during these two hours under the care of a friend of mine?"

"Will you be so good as to explain yourself? Your intention in regard to me?"

"I only intend," said Sir William, "that you should be kept out of mischief. The gentleman in whose care I shall put you will show you round the town, or anything of that kind, and that will keep you from drinking, or wishing to talk with anyone else."

"You are not complimentary, Sir William," said the actor.

"I see no necessity," said Sir William, "for compliments between us."

Sir William took the speaking-tube by his writing-table—"Do I hear Mr. Coverley out there?" "Yes, Sir William," came the reply. "Show him in."

Mr. Coverley entered, and looked with some hesitation from Sir William to the big man with the blank, shaven countenance.

"It's all right, Lionel," said Sir William. "Come in and shut the door. Here is a—a gentleman—Mr. Clare—who has come to me from London on business. He has an hour or two on his hands; will you oblige me by helping him to pass the time—showing him round the town, taking him for a drive—anyhow but drinking?"

"I'm not a drinker, Sir William," said Coverley.

"I know; but—er—Mr. Clare is."

"Only a glass in reason, Sir William," said Mr. Clare, and Coverley wondered at the precision of his utterance.

"Even the glass in reason had better be avoided at present," said Sir William. "I have important business," said he to Coverley by way of explanation, "to transact with Mr. Clare on his return with you. Will you bring him back here in two hours? Will you favour me so far?"

"With pleasure, Sir William," said Coverley. "But two hours hence? won't the bank be closed then?"

"Ring the bell; I shall let you in."

Coverley marched off with Mr. Clare; and Sir William sat down to devote his attention to the waiting business of the bank. For an hour he saw this person and that, and no one could have told that a terrible and damning crisis had arisen in the banker's life; only his nephew Philip remarked that he looked "rather tired," and he admitted that he was. At the end of an hour the bank was closed, and Sir William shut himself into his room and abandoned himself to the devouring considerations which had been eating at his attention since his alarming visitor had gone out.

What thermometer of philosophy can gauge the rapid changes of temperature a man's heart and hope may undergo in a few minutes? An hour ago Sir William was cheerful, nay, sanguine about himself and his affairs, a warm optimist, resolved bravely to

breast all the difficulties of life and business that he must encounter; now he was plunged incalculably low in the depths of ruin and disgrace, a cold and desperate pessimist, without a ray of hope. And the cause of the amazing change was a few words from his wife. His temptation was to traverse his terrible situation to and fro in thought, but, like a sentry on his beat, to make no progress. With a resolute effort he cast the temptation off, and faced the necessity for action and the attainment of a conclusion. Regrets for the past and objurgations of the present were vain; concession to either demand of his infamous wife would be equally ruinous; and crime to be rid of the trouble he would not stoop to. What, then, must he do? For an instant he saw himself bare of excuses, sophistications, and all the figments in which a man contrives for ease and comfort to wrap his real self; he saw himself bare, and he sat in judgment on himself, and in such a vivid, terrible moment no judge can be so swift in perception and understanding or so severe in condemnation as can be a man's own self. Thus and thus had he erred, and thus and thus had he sinned against this person and that, making others pay heavy and unjustifiable fines of fortune and reputation to maintain him in his false position before the world as a flawless and ungrimed pillar of probity, wealth, and social respectability. Had he not but now made use of his simple, honest brother, and to prop himself up endangered his brother's position? His quick sentence on himself was to make an end of all the pretence and falsehood in which he had lived, and yet by no means to benefit thereby the offensive person who was the immediate cause of his overthrow. He had sinned—at least he had erred—and he should suffer; but she—the woman through whom he had erred—she, if she did not suffer also, should at least not gain by his loss and her own infamy. She should neither

have ten thousand pounds to squander on a theatre, nor the title and position of Lady Pierrepont to drag in the mire to his open and shameful ruin and his family's disgrace; no, not that at all costs. But he would give her her just due; he would even fulfil her demand to the ear (and there he showed a touch of vindictiveness), though he would disappoint it to the hope. He would go to her and say, "I am your husband; you shall be by my side as you demand, but here in London, and in your own position and way of life. It is absolutely impossible that you should be Lady Pierrepont at East Dormus; but I have broken with East Dormus and all that it has meant for me,—family, position, and honour, —and I have come to London to begin life on another plane, and if you care to be Lady Pierrepont on a pound or two a week with me, you may. That is what I will do for you, my wife, and no other thing!"

These conclusions swept on him as the Chorus of Furies upon Orestes, and drove him forth to his fate. If it should seem unusual (as it is) and incredible (as it is not) that this heroic kind of solution of his difficulties should come upon a respectable, middle-aged banker, buttoned in a frock-coat, let the reader bethink him that a man is always either less or more than he seems. Sir William Pierrepont happened to be more than he seemed—other than even he himself might have guessed. The husk of modern civilisation was to him (as it is to more men than we think) but as his business frock-coat. Within him there dwelt the effects of a long line of notable ancestry, uncurbed in desire, fierce of will, ardent in devotion, swift and merciless in execution. Though the man was but a banker, his roll of pedigree could show the names of famous soldiers (one a Puritan colonel of Cromwell's army), successful sailors, and a celebrated bishop and saint. The Pierreponts had never been dull and

cloddish; they had ever been distinguished for the fulfilment of high duty, a passionate sense of rectitude and honour, and a somewhat uncompromising Puritanism in their views of religion and morality; and such qualities, though they go to sleep under easy modern conditions, start up awake in such a crisis as that in which Sir William was involved. Fierce and uncompromising, severe and unforgiving, Sir William now showed himself to be, and the heroic touch in him was that he was all these things with himself. He was a man who knew the world, and who could expect no more of it than he had already experienced; he had known wealth and social repute, and had no illusions left regarding them; therefore, it may be granted, it was easier for him to do as he had resolved than for a younger man. And without hesitation he took his way forward, turning neither to the right hand nor to the left.

The time was short, and there was much to do; he must, especially, see that he left behind him no loose end of business, the neglect of which might mean injustice or loss to someone. He first thought of the position of danger in which he had placed his brother, the Squire, by asking for his signature—this danger he would cancel at once. He went to his safe and took out certain bonds which he had been keeping to "ripen," and then he sat down and wrote a letter to his brother. He told him in a short, desperate sentence or two his position as the discovered husband of an infamous and unscrupulous woman, and his intention of disappearing utterly.

"Do not seek to discover me," he wrote, "in the wretched life I shall have to pursue. Enclosed you will find securities which ought to cover fully the liability you incurred the other day by your signature. If, by unlucky chance, they should come upon you for reimbursement of the loan, then sell the securities out and pay the loan. If they do not come

upon you, keep the bonds; they are a speculation of my own; keep them for some time, for they are sure to rise in value. God bless you, Robert! You have been a very good brother to me."

The letter he placed with the bonds in a large envelope, which he sealed.

Next he thought of Mr. Coverley, and the uncompleted arrangement for his tenancy of Brockham. He had promised the young man that he should have the lease the next time he called. Again he went to the safe and took out one or two papers; and again he sat down and wrote a letter; and again he put letter and papers in a large envelope, which he sealed—a proceeding which seemed odd, considering that he would soon be face to face with the young man himself.

He was about to begin a third letter—to his nephew Philip, whom he neither loved nor trusted very much, but who must now undertake the management of the bank—when the bell rang, and he determined to write that letter from London. His time was up. The clerks were all gone, and he rose and went out to the door himself, and let in Mr. Coverley and the big man with the blank wall of shaven countenance.

CHAPTER VIII

JOHN EVELEGH'S ASTONISHING THEFT

"MR. CLARE," said Sir William, when he had led within as far as the anteroom of his sanctum, "will you wait here for a minute or two while I have a word with Mr. Coverley? There are time-tables: you can amuse yourself by looking out a train: you have a return ticket, I presume?"

He followed Coverley into his own room and shut the door. He resolutely looked the young man in the face, to judge if Mr. Clare had let out anything of his business; he saw no sign of discomposure or strangeness, and he was satisfied.

"Lionel," said he, "I have another favour to ask of you. But, first, here are the papers relating to Brockham, and with them a confidential communication I have written concerning a matter which has long troubled you—your parentage: oblige me by not breaking the seal until to-morrow. And here is a packet of valuable papers for my brother which I do not like to commit to the post: will you deliver it? To-morrow will do for that also. Will you do that for me?"

"Certainly, Sir William," answered the wondering young man.

Sir William took an elastic band, bound the two packets together, and handed them over to Coverley, who straightway thrust them in the inner pocket of his light, loose overcoat.

"But the real service I wish you to do," said Sir

William, "is this: I must return to London with that man to-night, but first I must go home to get one or two things. I have reasons for not taking him with me, and I cannot trust him alone; he might go drinking and miss his train. Will you travel with him as far as the Junction? I shall drive there, and meet you in time for the seven-thirty main line express. Will you do that for me?"

"Of course, Sir William," answered the young man readily enough; but still he wondered.

Sir William looked at him, and hesitated. "Perhaps," said he, "you think, Why doesn't he ask his nephew Philip to do that? But this is a matter in which I would not trust Philip; and even if I could trust him, I had rather you did this for me than anyone else."

"I am flattered, Sir William, by your preference," said Coverley.

Sir William grasped his hand and gave it a lingering pressure. "Good-bye," said he. "It will be some time, I fear, before I see you again. Think as well of me as you can." Coverley looked surprised and perplexed. He had a mind to ask if anything was the matter, but Sir William's look forbade him. "Do you mind," finished Sir William, "waiting a moment in the other room while I have a final word with that man?"

Coverley went out, and Clare was invited to enter.

"Now, Sir William," said the man, "I have been waiting a long time for that cheque."

The threatening note of self-assertion was so unlike anything yet heard from him that Sir William stared. He saw nothing, however, but the blank wall of cheek and the open, expressionless eye, that blinked at wide intervals like a toad's.

"Cheque?" said Sir William quickly. "You don't imagine I would entrust a cheque to a man who

brought me such very poor credentials of authority as you bring? Besides, a cheque is an awkward piece of paper: if you have not had too much to do with cheques, you may not know that a cheque must pass through a good many hands, and the signature that gives it value come under a good many eyes, before it finally returns to the person that issued it." The man gave no sign of either ignorance or knowledge. "I propose to go to London to-night," continued Sir William, "and see Mrs. Stonebridge herself."

"Lady Pierrepoint," corrected the man.

"As you will," said Sir William, waving the correction lightly aside. "And I propose that you should go with me. Will that suit you?"

He stared a good while with his open toad's eye, so that one could not have said whether he had passed into a dream or was considering Sir William from afar. At length his eye emitted the correct toad's blink of conclusion and action, and he answered, "It will."

"It is necessary for me to go to my house first," continued Sir William, "and I cannot have the pleasure of your company. I have asked my friend, Mr. Coverley, to see you to the station and to accompany you to the Junction, where I shall meet you in time for the London train. Have you any objection to that arrangement?"

Again the blank cheek and the toad's eye seemed to dream or to consider, and the answer came, "None whatever. If you don't meet me at the Junction, Sir William, I shall not go on, and I will return here to-morrow."

"Certainly you may," said Sir William, and rose to dismiss him.

"But I need not trouble your friend," said he. "I know my way, and," desperately, "I must have something to eat."

"I prefer that my friend should go with you,"

said Sir William, with decision. "You can get a meal at the Junction; and you must not remain in this town to be remarked longer than is absolutely necessary."

"Food at a railway refreshment-room is very dear, Sir William," said the man, and his cheek was as blank as ever and his eye as toad-like; "and I am possessed of something less than one shilling sterling."

"Really?" exclaimed Sir William. He said no more, but his tone and his look clearly meant, "To come to a man on such a business as you have come on, and then to ask him for charity, goes beyond human endurance; but nevertheless"— He gave him half a sovereign.

"I am obliged to you, Sir William. And, believe me, this visit to you is not my idea."

Sir William merely bowed, as if he would say, "I can well believe that; but let us say no more about it." And so he bowed the man out.

Now the chronicle of the next hour or two is of the greatest consequence.

Mr. Coverley walked to the station in the company of the man Clare. It was past five o'clock, and daylight still lingered. Coverley was greeted by several persons as he passed on his way, and his companion was closely and curiously scrutinised, as being plainly a stranger to the country town. Neither was disposed for conversation, Coverley the less that he suspected his companion's business with Sir William was of a disagreeable sort, and he shrank with dislike from all men whose business it seemed to be to make life disagreeable; moreover, he did not approve of the toad-mask which the man wore. Therefore, when they reached the station, Coverley bought a paper to occupy himself withal, and his companion did likewise. But the train was tolerably filled with people returning from market, and some entered into

conversation with Coverley. The wayside stations gradually drew off the company, till Coverley and his companion alone were left in their compartment. Then Coverley took up his paper; but he had been up very early, he was tired, and the pleasantness of sleep overcame him. He woke up with the sound of the clinking and clattering of the train and the screaming of its whistle past the "points" of the Junction.

Arrived at the platform, Mr. Clare went straight to the refreshment-room, and Coverley went with him; and, discovering a necessity also for food and drink, he sat down to table with him. It was then difficult to refrain altogether from talk. Clare asked a question, and Coverley answered. Had they seen Squire Pierrepont's property as they passed in the train? No; the Squire's property was away farther to the south, remote from the railway line. And where was Sir William's house? A little way out the Pierrepont road, in the direction they had come. And Sir William, Mr. Clare supposed, was a man of some considerable consequence and reputation in the neighbourhood? Certainly he was, Coverley answered. Then, finally, the owner of the blank wall of countenance and the toad's eye informed Coverley that he was an *actor*, and Coverley was surprised, and wondered what kind of acquaintance or business Sir William cultivated with such a man. They walked out again upon the platform, and, Mr. Clare's tongue being now unloosed on a subject which may be called his own, they talked of London theatres and actors, until Sir William appeared carrying a small portmanteau. The bell rang; the express rushed into the station; Sir William and the actor entered the train, both travelling third class; the guard's whistle sounded; and the last Coverley saw of Sir William was a smile and a wave of the hand,—the memory of which was doubly impressed on him by events now hastening to fulfilment.

Coverley took the train back to East Dormus. On leaving the station, he passed near the little house where John Evelegh, late of Brockham, had taken up his abode with his daughter and his widow relative. On the lintel of the door was an insignificant signboard, scarcely larger than that on which taverns and similar places of entertainment confess reluctantly and in the dimmest of letters that they are "licensed to sell beer, wine, spirits, and tobacco."

John Evelegh merely confessed himself on his board a "corn and coal merchant"; which by no means implied that he had a store of these commodities at hand, but only that he sold them "on commission." "Poor Evelegh!" thought the young man as he came to the house; for though he could not see the little signboard in the darkness, he knew it was there.

He desired a sight of Jenny and a word with her. He walked past the little house, and, seeing a light in the little parlour, he whistled a low, peculiar note or two; he returned and repeated the same whistle. The door was softly opened, and Jenny looked out into the night. She recognised her lover, closed the door without latching it, and came to him hurriedly.

"Oh, Lionel," she exclaimed, "what are you doing here? Father is at home!"

"Never mind," said the reckless lover; "he has his pipe and his newspaper to-night,—hasn't he? And it's not often I have the chance of seeing you now Jenny."

"But why are you not gone home?" she asked. "You're usually home long before this."

"Come this way," said he, taking her arm and pressing it to him, "and I shall tell you all about it."

He drew her down the narrow, dark lane which was separated from John Evelegh's strip of garden only by a scrubby hedge, and he began to tell her about

the singular favours Sir William had asked him to do that day. The evening was cold, and Jenny let a spasm of shiver pass over her.

"How stupid I am!" exclaimed her lover. "You have nothing to wrap you from the cold! Take this." And he drew off his overcoat and put it about Jenny's shoulders.

She at first protested he must need the coat himself, but she yielded to his urgency, and drew close the garment warm from his dear person. "What a lot of things you have in your pockets, Lionel!" she exclaimed. "I can feel piles of papers and letters! What a great deal of business you must have been doing! But are they all on business?"

"I have a packet of papers Sir William gave me," said he;—he refrained from mentioning the Brockham lease. "I mustn't lose them," he added; "they're worth their weight in gold and more."

"Jenny!" called a voice from behind the hedge.

"Oh, Lionel," whispered Jenny, "it's father!"

"Jenny!" called the voice again, coming nearer. "Just you come here, my girl, and bring that feller that's in your company. Let him show his face in the light!"

"Oh, go away, Lionel!" cried Jenny to her lover, thrusting his coat into his hands. "If he knows it's you, he'll be dreadful."

"I'll stay," said Coverley. "This is a good opportunity for coming to the point with him, and letting him know it's me."

Evelegh was at the hedge, beginning to force himself through.

"Don't trouble to break down the hedge, Mr. Evelegh," called the young man; "we'll come round by the gate."

He took Jenny's hand to reassure her, and together they went round to the open door of the house. John Evelegh was already there, breathing hard and glaring. When the light fell upon Coverley's face, "Ah," exclaimed Evelegh, "it's you! I thought as

much! A feller pretends to be friending me, and he goes behind my back and as good as steals what I have worked for; that's what he does! Same way, I suppose, he pretends to be friending my daughter, because he wants to steal summat from her."

"For shame, father!" cried Jenny, laying her hand on his arm.

"It's much you know about it, my gell," said Evelegh. "But you go in. I'll put a stopper on it."

"I can't go in, father," said Jenny, "unless you invite Mr. Coverley in too; he has something to say to you."

Her father glared and fumed at such unusual disobedience, while Jenny returned his gaze, fearless but trembling. He turned to Coverley.

"I wish to have a word with you, Mr. Evelegh," said Coverley, "and I had rather not say it on so public a place as your doorstep."

Evelegh muttered the saying about "fine words" and "parsnips," and led the way into the little parlour. Coverley, alone, followed him.

"Now, what is it?" said Evelegh, turning in the middle of the room. "If it's any more of your friending, you can take it off wi' you."

The scene between them was short, sharp, and inflammatory. Neither was in any condition to talk reasonably to the other; for even Coverley's temper this time was at the extremest point of endurance.

"I'll say what I have to say in a few words," said Coverley.

"Ay, do," said Evelegh.

"I love your daughter, Evelegh, and she returns my feeling"—

"Laid in wait for her, I'll be bound," interrupted Evelegh, glaring at the wall, "by stiles and lanes."

"I wish to marry her," said Coverley in much the same tone as an officer might use on the parade ground.

"Oh, do ye?" cried Evelegh, turning suddenly a

fierce white eye upon him. "Gi'e the gell a lift up, I suppose you think. She hevn't much chance now, the gell hevn't—that's what you thinks to yourself—and she's good for house and dairy; save a housekeeper's wage, thinks you. Well, you won't, Mr. gentleman-farmer. My gell en't agoin' to be your drudge. And you may stand there and wish till your beard grows to the ground, but she won't. I wouldn't gi'e my gell to you—gentleman and eddicate, as you think yourself—no, not for a hundred thousand million pounds. So you may as well take that for an answer, first as last, and go!"

"You're taking no account of your daughter's feelings," said Coverley.

"She'll get over her feelings; don't you fret," said Evelegh, with a heavy touch of sarcasm. "If she has no more chances than o' you, she'd better die a maid. Now, just go, I ax you!"

"I'll go," said the young man, now hot to the bursting point of anger. "You've never shown me anything but anger and insult, Evelegh. I can't consider you any longer fit to talk to; and the next time I enter your door I'll have to be *axed*!"

The young man flung out, and Evelegh stood a moment breathing hard—"The villain! The scamp!"—while his heart thumped and his brain throbbed. It occurred to him that perhaps, since Jenny had not entered, she and her lover (the villain) had resumed their private conversation. In a furious transport of rage and jealousy, he declared to himself that he would not endure it, and turned to dash out. His eye fell upon Coverley's forgotten overcoat, carelessly laid on the back of a chair, and he stopped. He stepped up to it and looked on it with as much rage and hatred as if it were Coverley himself. He contemptuously turned over one of the lappets, feeling the texture of the cloth, and saying to himself—

"Of course, he's the fine gentleman. He's Coverley, Isquire!"

He snatched up the coat to fling it after its owner, when something bulky in one of the pockets struck against the back of the chair. He cast a recollective eye up to the corner of the low ceiling; had he not overheard Coverley say to Jenny that he had valuable papers in his pocket, worth their weight in gold and more? If Coverley lost these papers, then he would be likely to know what trouble was, what worry was and desperate heaviness of heart. Let Coverley know trouble! Let his proud, insolent, gentleman's heart be tamed and brought low! It would do him good! Thus Evelegh thought, in thick pants, as he glanced towards the door and turned the coat hurriedly over on his arm. He felt in the pocket, found it on the outside, and drew forth two long blue envelopes, bound together with an elastic band. There was also a thick newspaper in the pocket, but that he left. He disposed the coat on the chair back as it had been before, not pausing to consider why he need arrange it so carefully, and moved a step back with the packet in his trembling hand. He looked at the door; he did not dare to go and lock it, and he hovered between his own seat and the chair on which the coat was laid, with divided glance and thought. He did not—he would not—look even at the superscription of the envelope, but it was almost in his pocket when there flashed on him the thought—

"John Evelegh, you're a thief! You that have never yet stolen so much as a potato or a feed of corn, would steal, not gold indeed, but *this*, which is said to be worth more than gold!"

And in a moment, while his heart thumped wildly, he saw himself detected, exposed, disgraced, or condemned. "No, no, that must never be," he thought, and withdrew the thing from his pocket; but into his hesitation no grain of pity for Coverley entered.

In another moment his resentment against the young man returned upon his attention, and he hardened his heart still more against him. Had not, he thought, Providence—yes, Providence—put this chance in his way to punish Coverley for the great harm he had done? And what real risk was there of detection and exposure? Yet the papers were not his, and they would be sure to be inquired for. He would put them back; that was the shortest, the only way to allay the painful scruples that rose upon him. He had taken a step towards the coat when the door opened and in came his daughter! There was no help for him; he could not but drop the thing into his pocket—and he was irretrievably a thief! His exceeding rage against Coverley was swallowed up in this new and amazing condition in which he found himself, so that it was quite humbly that, taking up his pipe, he asked his daughter for the matches.

"Here they are, father," said she, and, thinking from his tone that he might be relenting, she looked at him with appealing eyes. But he avoided her look, and filled his pipe with a set frown.

Presently there came a knock at the door. Evelegh turned a grim and thoughtful eye, and his daughter went out. She returned, looking a little frightened.

"Mr. Coverley," said she, "has come back for his coat;" and she took it from the back of the chair and again went out. Evelegh waited with grim, tight mouth, and with his pipe hanging between his fingers. There was no sound, no return to demand the lost packet, and he scratched a match and lit his pipe.

Now, had Sir William Pierrepont not sent Coverley to the Junction, Coverley would not have gone that night to see Jenny; or, having gone to see Jenny, if he had not met her out of doors and stripped off his

coat to keep her warm, then those valuable papers would not have been lost, and certain desperate issues, which are the concern of this story, would not have arisen.

But Fate, in working out human lives, takes no account of the things that might have been.

CHAPTER IX

A THREE-CORNERED CHAPTER

COVERLEY left the presence of John Evelegh hot at heart, and labouring with the restrained desire to speak out once for all and let the stupid, foolish man hear what he thought (and what all sensible people must think) of his obstinate, furious, and unreasoning prejudice against himself. But of one little thing he had a shame which already somewhat tamed his resentment,—and it is evident how, even in what seem passionate crises, some men keep complete knowledge and memory of all they say and do: he had, on the spur of momentary impatience, mimicked the angry farmer's pronunciation of the word "asked," and so he had outraged his own sense of proper and gentlemanly behaviour. He was ashamed he had done so; he was glad Jenny had not heard him, for he felt it would have wounded her terribly; and he hoped Evelegh had not noted him.

At the little latch-gate Jenny was waiting for him. With a gentle impulsiveness, as free from abandonment as from silly coyness, she took his hand.

"My poor dear!" said she. "I see—I was sure—how it would be! I can't understand what has come over father about you!"

"Look here, Jenny!" said her lover, with her hand in his. "I see very plainly that presently you will have to decide between your father and me!"

"Oh, poor old man!" exclaimed Jenny, with-

drawing her hand (though her father was little more than fifty, she was accustomed to think of him as old). "What would he do without me?"

"He has Mrs. Sumner," said Coverley.

"But Mrs. Sumner is not his own flesh and blood! No, Lionel," she continued sadly; "it may be foolish, and it may be superstitious in me, but I couldn't be happy if I left him without his blessing, if—if he didn't give me away. Lionel," she added, "don't you think you had better get out of all this trouble about me, and find some other girl to love you?"

"My dear Jenny," said he tenderly, "you don't seem to understand yet. There are many men, I believe, who are in love with womankind, and who can quite easily shift about from one girl to another, loving everyone in a sort of way. But I am not of that kind. I love you—for some reason or other; I wonder why?" he added mischievously, while Jenny caught his hand in a close pressure. "And I am not going to be put off loving you by any opposition of your father."

"Oh, but are you sure," asked Jenny, with the self-doubt of modesty and love, "that you will be really and truly happy with me?"

You see, Jenny was evidently not one of the "daughters of revolt" of whom one hears so much (but not one of whom, I confess, have I ever met), who only seem to consider whether imbecile, degraded, tyrannical man is fit to tie their shoe-latchet or worthy to receive the smallest of their favours. Hers was the temper of gentle love, of the love that thinketh no evil, that seeketh not its own,—the true, lovely love of woman that has made the names of "wife" and "mother" sacred throughout the ages, and that has kept the world sweet and wholesome until now. But all explanation or exposition of love must ever be but the foolishness of preaching to those who have never been in love. If ever I meet a

"revolted daughter" who wishes to discuss this matter with me, I shall say, "O daughter, have you ever been in love? If you have not, wait until you are, and then we can talk."

"Jenny," said her lover half-tenderly, half-reproachfully, "happy? Haven't I told you that all my happiness will be yours. But, my dear," added he suddenly, thinking of what Sir William had said of a "communication," "I shall have something to tell you to-morrow or the day after, if I can manage to see you— Oh, I have forgotten my coat."

"I'll get it for you," said Jenny, and tripped indoors. When she brought it out, she helped him to put it on, saying, "I mustn't stay longer. Father is waiting for me."

They exchanged the adieus of lovers, and Coverley hurried off to his inn to release his wondering horse; and in a few minutes he was galloping home. Arrived at Holly Bush Farm, he saw his horse stabled and suppered (like a good master), and then he himself went in. He passed through the big kitchen, where a bright fire threw the reflections of his foreman and shepherd up among the dark oaken rafters. They turned their ruddy faces from the sleepy heat to greet him. He questioned them about the day's doings, asked his housekeeper, who was moving in the background, to bring him some food, and departed into the parlour. He sat down before the fire in ruminative mood, with hat and coat still on, and began to empty his pockets of what they had gathered in the course of the day. His earliest thought was of the two envelopes which Sir William had given him. In the fullest hope he put his hand into his inner pocket, and drew out—a folded newspaper! no more! With a heart beating up into horrid anxiety, he thrust his hands into the outer pockets of his overcoat; then, with the thought that he might have mistaken his inner for his outer coat,

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he took off his overcoat and felt in all his other pockets, and stood transfixed with amazement, dread, and suspicion! The Squire's papers—papers of great value, Sir William had said!—were lost! And his own papers—the lease of Brockham, and Sir William's communication concerning his parentage—were lost also!

Where—how had he lost them? His suspicion flew to the unprepossessing stranger whom he had led about for Sir William. That man—the actor Clare (he was glad he had learned he was an actor; he would be able to find him)—must have overheard what Sir William had said about valuable papers, and must have taken them from his pocket when he dropped asleep in the train! How otherwise could he have lost them? They could not have fallen from his pocket by the way—unless, indeed, they had slipped out when his coat lay on the chair in Evelegh's house! His housekeeper entered with his supper, and, seeing him stand with his coat in his hand, staring in fixed reflection, she asked if anything was wrong.

"I've lost some papers; that's all," said he. "But I can't do anything to find them to-night," he continued, more to himself than to her. "No; I can do nothing to-night."

He considered that, if they *had* been lost anywhere by the way, being merely sealed envelopes, no ordinary thief would trouble to keep them; if they had been dropped at Evelegh's, they would be as safe there till the morrow as in his own house; and if—as he believed—the stranger had stolen them, still nothing was to be gained by riding back to the town that night. Therefore he resolutely sat down to supper and ate with tolerable appetite; and in a little while thereafter he went to bed, for five was his hour for waking in the morning.

While tramping about his duties in the silence of

the dawn, he resolved upon his course of action. It was Saturday, and after breakfast he set house and farm in order for that day and the next, put a few things into a Gladstone bag, and was driven off in his dogcart towards the town. But, first, he turned aside to tell the Squire of his misfortune. He arrived at Pierrepont Hall before the end of breakfast, and was shown into what was called the study, in which the most notable signs of "study" were an easy chair, an *Encyclopædia Britannica* (seventh edition), and some numbers of *The Field.* The Squire came at once.

"Have you breakfasted, Coverley? Ah yes; I suppose you must have. You're the early bird that catches the worms."

"I doubt it," said Coverley. "I fear I have been the early worm that comes out to be caught."

"What does that mean?" said the Squire. "Hey? But you've some business to talk about, I see. Allow me five minutes to finish my breakfast, will you?"

"Certainly, Squire, finish breakfast," said Coverley. "I must apologise for interrupting you."

In five minutes the Squire returned,—he gladly seized any occasion for being business-like and punctual,—and sat down to listen to Coverley.

"I have to tell you of a misfortune that has happened to me, Squire. Yesterday afternoon Sir William gave me in an envelope the lease of Brockham and another paper or two, and at the same time he gave me to deliver to you to-day a packet of valuable papers,—Sir William called them 'valuable,' —and somehow I've managed to lose both your packet and my own; they were bound together with an elastic band. I discovered my loss when I got home last night."

"But," exclaimed the Squire, "I only left my brother yesterday after lunch; we had just returned from London! What packet of papers—valuable

papers — could he want to send to me so soon after?"

"That, of course, I cannot guess, Squire; but he said he did not like to trust them to the post, and that I need not deliver them to you until to-day."

"When did you see him?"

"Well, it's a curious story," said Coverley, and the Squire opened his eyes and his ears while the young man related how he had been asked to lead about and take charge of Sir William's strange visitor, and how the papers had been given him when Sir William was arranging for his return to London in the stranger's company.

"Gone back to London!—in such a hurry!" exclaimed the Squire. "Why, we only came away yesterday! It's very odd! It's—very queer, Coverley!" And the Squire became as pale as his ruddiness would permit.

"And," said Coverley, now more smitten himself with the queerness of the circumstances, "there was one thing which I would only mention to you, Squire, as it makes the affair seem still more queer to my mind: Sir William, when I parted from him, shook hands with me and said, 'I shall probably not see you again for a long while'—or something like that; 'try to think as well of me as you can.'"

"He said that?" exclaimed the Squire, and passed his hand over his ruffled forehead. "Well, I must say, Coverley, I don't like the look of things at all. But let us keep it to ourselves. But about the packets—how do you think you lost them?"

"I believe that man stole them from me," and he described his journey, etc., with the man to the Junction.

"What was the man like?" asked the Squire.

"He was a big, clean-shaved man," answered Coverley. "He told me himself he was an actor, and

Sir William introduced him to me by the name of Clare. I don't think it will be difficult to find him."

"Clare?" exclaimed the Squire. "Clare, did you say? And an actor! Coverley, I doubt there's trouble in this for us all!—great trouble! Poor William! I wonder—I wonder— Again I beg to ask you, let this be quite between ourselves! But now—now we must think of what's to be done."

"My intention was," said Coverley, "to drive at once into the town, and go to Mr. Philip, and ask him for Sir William's address in London."

"I doubt if he will know it, Coverley," said the Squire, pacing the room; "I doubt very much."

"Can you suggest any other way, Squire?" asked Coverley.

"No, I can't," answered the Squire, with decision. "And I'll go with you; it will perhaps turn out to be more my affair than yours."

Coverley said that his dogcart was waiting at the door; but the Squire would not hear of using the farmer's horse and trap, and wasting his man's time.

"No, no," said he; "send your dogcart and man home; there are two or three lazy men and horses about my stable, and they might as well be doing something, for 'Satan finds'—you know."

Coverley agreed to send his trap home, and went out for that purpose, while the Squire withdrew to make his own preparations.

"I have made my arrangements, Squire," said Coverley at the door, "to follow the business to London."

"That, of course," said the Squire.

Just at that moment the ladies of the house appeared from the breakfast-room.

"Going to London, Mr Coverley, did I hear you say?" was the greeting of the Squire's sister.

"Oh, Louisa," said her brother, "see that some things are put into a bag for me—enough for a day or two from home; there's a good woman."

"What? You going to London too, when you've just come from the place?" exclaimed the lady. "What's the meaning of this?"

"I shall tell you when I come upstairs," answered the Squire, and, turning to Coverley, he made a tight mouth, as much as to say, "Keep it to yourself."

"What conspiracy," asked the sharp-eyed Adela, "are papa and you engaged in, Mr. Coverley? The taking of a new farm?"

"No, Miss Adela," answered Coverley, with the hint of a blush; "rather the recovery of an old one."

Dorothy hung upon her sister's arm, and the two regarded Coverley with the tender indulgence and curiosity which maidens always display towards a man who is believed to be in love—while a man engaged becomes the cynosure of every female eye. The sisters seemed resolved to hold him in talk, to note, and to con, with the keen feminine sense in such matters, his tones and his bearing, his reserves and his hesitation.

"Is it fair to ask, Mr. Coverley," said Adela, "what you are going to do with the house at Brockham?"

"I intend to keep it aired, Miss Adela," said Coverley, with admirable self-possession, "until Mr. Evelegh is willing to go back to it."

"Isn't he a foolish, proud, obstinate old man not to accept your offer?" exclaimed Adela.

"He is an obstinate fellow," said Coverley.

"And we guess," said Dorothy, with a pretty wag of the head, "who bought in his old oak secretary and his big arm-chair at the sale, and sent them on to him as an anonymous present."

"Then, for Heaven's sake, don't mention it," cried Coverley, "for he will send them back!"

"Is he so dreadfully set against you as that?" demanded Adela.

"He is," answered Coverley. "But he will learn better. He has lived a good many years," he added, with a smile, "but he is still very young in the ways of the world—a mere boy."

"All that must be very sad for Jenny," said Dorothy.

"It is very sad for her," said Coverley.

And thus these two simple maidens, apparently putting easy questions with the innocence of doves, were in reality subtle inquisitors, metaphorically probing and pinching the big, handsome male creature to see what he was made of. They continued their examination until the Squire appeared, and his dogcart was brought round. The Squire kissed his daughters (Adela casting a coquettish glance the while at Coverley, as if she would say, "How would you like to be doing the same?"). Coverley raised his hat, and the two were driven away.

Arrived at the entrance of the town, Coverley asked that he might descend from the dogcart, saying he must "look in" somewhere, and promising to meet the Squire in a quarter of an hour at the bank. He had not mentioned to the Squire his visit to Evelegh's the evening before, and he said nothing now of his desire to make sure that his lost packets had not been dropped there.

He knocked at Evelegh's door. His knock was answered by Mrs. Sumner. He asked to see Jenny for a moment. Jenny came.

"Lionel!" she exclaimed. "Is anything the matter?"

"Only this, Jenny," he answered: "you remember I mentioned last night that I had in the pocket of my coat some valuable papers; I've lost them."

"Lost them?" exclaimed Jenny.

"I have thought," continued Coverley, "that they might have dropped from my pocket when my coat lay in your parlour; two big blue envelopes, fastened together with an elastic band."

"I've seen or heard nothing about them," answered Jenny; "but I'll ask father."

Jenny went in, while Coverley waited without. In a second or two she returned. "Father says he hasn't found any papers."

"No, I thought it wasn't here I lost them; but I wanted to make sure," he said promptly, "before going on."

"But where have you lost them, then?" asked the anxious Jenny.

"I think I know where, and how," he answered. "I mustn't stay, Jenny. I expect to go to London after them."

"To London?" exclaimed the bewildered Jenny.

"Yes," he answered. "But I must go. Good-bye, my dear. I'll tell you all about it when I come back."

"Good-bye," said Jenny, and saw him speed away with a wondering wistfulness.

Coverley found the Squire loitering between the Pierrepont Arms and the bank, and they entered together and inquired for Mr. Philip. Philip received them in the anteroom of Sir William's sanctum.

"Do you know, Philip, where my brother is?" asked the Squire bluntly.

"You know he is not here, then?" said Philip at once, and he glanced quickly from the one to the other, and from the travelling-bag of the one to that of the other, watchful and alert.

Though Coverley knew little, and had seen almost nothing, of Philip Pierrepont, he did not like him. Philip always appeared to him a man of metal (not

mettle; that is quite another thing): eyes of a steely hardness and flash, a mouth like a vice, tones that sounded like the turning and snapping of a key in a lock, a constitution of iron ("hard as nails," as the common saying has it), bowels of lead, and a front of brass, and withal as handsome a presence as that of a bronze statue. He always repelled Coverley, as the anvil repels the hammer.

"I happen to know," said Coverley, "that Sir William returned to London last night."

"Oh, you do?" said Philip, as if he noted that as an incriminating and entangling admission. "Then," he added, glancing again from the one to the other, "why come and ask me where Sir William is?"

"Because," answered Coverley promptly, "we have thought that he might have left word with you of the particular address to which he was going."

"He has not," said Philip. He was not offended; he was only hard—metallic.

"Look here, Philip," said the Squire, "let us understand each other. I'm not a croaker commonly, I believe; I think no man can call me that; but I'm afraid this means trouble for us all."

"What?" said Philip, and his steely eyes glittered, his metallic tones rang clear but low between his tight lips, and his nerves of steel were screwed up. "Do you think, uncle, that Sir William has *absconded*?"

"*Absconded?*" stuttered the Squire in amazement and terror. "God forbid! What for? Why should he do that?"

"Oh," said Philip, "I thought that was what you meant."

"I meant nothing of the sort!" said the Squire, indignant in his relief. "Meant something else altogether. I thought you wouldn't know where your uncle is, but Coverley here thought you might;

and it's Coverley's business that has brought us in, though it's mine too. Tell him about it," he ejaculated to Coverley.

"You saw I was here yesterday afternoon," said Coverley. "Sir William then gave me two envelopes —one for myself and the other to deliver to the Squire. I've lost them."

"Oh, lost them?" noted Philip, again with that tone of incriminating evidence.

"In Coverley's envelope," broke in the Squire, "was the lease of Brockham, he knows that; and something else, I don't know what. But we don't know what was in my envelope."

"Valuable papers," put in Coverley, "Sir William said."

Philip looked from the one to the other and marked every word.

"But we don't know what they are," repeated the Squire. "And so we're going to London"—Philip's look implied that he accepted that intention on the evidence of the two travelling-bags—"to find out from your uncle what they are, so that we may set about finding them as soon as possible. I am telling you all that, Philip, that you may understand there is no suspicion in my mind of your uncle's having so far forgotten and disgraced himself as to do what you named; I cannot bring myself to repeat the word."

"I wish I could believe, uncle," said Philip, "that your only reason for seeking out Sir William is what you say."

"If there is any other reason, Philip," said the Squire, with an unusual gentleness and pathos, "you are likely to know it when I come back, if not before. And meantime, Philip, your uncle's honour is in your hands, and ours; don't forget that."

The Squire grasped his nephew's hand, Coverley and Philip bowed to each other, and so they parted.

That was a memorable conversation; and if the Squire and Coverley missed its full significance for the time, they soon had it thrust upon them; while Philip, for his part, immediately laid up all their statements and pondered them in his heart.

CHAPTER X

LADY PIERREPONT

ABOUT two o'clock the Squire and Coverley were in London, each with a distinct end in view.

"I shall look up Sir William," the Squire had said, "at his old addresses."

"Clare," Coverley had said, "will not be difficult to light on, I should think. He talked a great deal about the Variety Theatre."

"Yes, the Variety," the Squire had thereupon remarked; "I was there the night before last."

They agreed that each should accompany the other on his quest, an arrangement which would be the more easily fulfilled that little could be done at the Variety Theatre till the evening. They drove, accordingly, from the station to that quiet hotel off the Strand which the Squire and his brother had left the day before. The Squire inquired for Sir William. Sir William was not staying there. That was their first disappointment. They resolved to make that hotel their headquarters, and, leaving their travelling-bags, they sallied forth to eat lunch, and thereafter to pursue their inquiries. On their way to lunch they turned aside to examine the bill of the Variety Theatre. It was well-nigh a disappointment to find no name of Clare in the list of players or functionaries, but the answer to a question at the box-office caught the sinking sense of disappointment and raised it into hope—Mr. Clare *might* be heard of on business in

the evening. After lunch they went to Sir William's club and inquired for him. Sir William, the hall porter said, was not in the club, and had not been in the club for three days. With that second failure to find his brother, the Squire incontinently resolved to visit every hotel that he could remember his brother had ever spoken of having stayed at. He hired a cab, and he and Coverley were driven from one to another, with the same result at all—no Sir William Pierrepont was staying there. Nor could it be supposed he was in any one of them under an assumed name, for all professed to remember not only his name, but also his appearance. By the time the Squire's list was run through, the afternoon was wearing late; fog and darkness were descending on the great city, making of it a vast blot, spotted, as it were, with pimples and blotches of weary illumination; it was of no use to visit the City, to hear, perchance, of Sir William at any of the houses with which he had dealings, for it was Saturday, and the business of the City was hushed; and the Squire, with dejection and misgiving, and his companion with hope, returned to their hotel of sojourn.

"Now, Squire," said Coverley, "it's my turn."

"And mine, too, I very much fear," said the Squire. Coverley did not understand him, but he did not press for an explanation.

They were at the Variety Theatre an hour before the performance should begin. They went to the stage-door and inquired for Mr. Clare. Neither Mr. Clare nor his sister, said the door-keeper, had yet arrived. Mrs. Stonebridge was not "on" till the end of the first act.

"Mrs. Stonebridge is Mr. Clare's sister, of course?" queried the Squire.

"Of course, sir," answered the man.

"I thought as much!" groaned the Squire as he turned away. "I feared as much!"

Still Coverley was at a loss to guess the meaning of these ejaculations, but still he refrained from question with an instinctive dread. They passed up and down the back lane in which was placed the stage-door of the Variety. They said not a word to each other until a man and a woman approached. The light of a flickering gas-lamp fell on them.

"Here he is," said Coverley.

"Who?" said the Squire. "My brother?"

"No. Mr. Clare—with his sister, I suppose."

When the two were turning towards the stage-door, Coverley stepped forward. "Mr. Clare, may I have a word with you?" The man peered in his face, and cast a hasty glance of suspicion on the Squire; the woman, with a careless look, pushed the door open and passed in. "My name is Coverley," continued he. "I saw something of you yesterday at East Dormus."

"Oh yes," said Clare: "Mr. Coverley, the friend of Sir William Pierrepont. And what," he asked, "is your pleasure with me, Mr. Coverley?"

Now that he had come to the point, Coverley felt the question he had to put was exceedingly disagreeable; it was impossible that he should utter a downright charge of theft, and call a policeman to arrest the man if he did not at once give up what he had stolen. He suggested his business as delicately as he could.

"I travelled with you, Mr. Clare, yesterday evening from East Dormus to the Junction. I had in my pocket two sealed envelopes with papers—nothing but papers, though valuable; I've lost them, and I cannot for the life of me think when or where, except on that railway journey. Can you remember having seen anything of them?—seen them, perhaps, in my hand, or in this pocket?"

"Two sealed envelopes? No—certainly!" answered

Clare, with formal precision. "I never knew you had such things on your person."

"I thought you might have seen Sir William give them to me in the bank," said Coverley. "Presuming somehow, that there is no love lost between you and Sir William—pardon me if I am wrong"—

"There *is* no love lost between Sir William and me;" and the impassive-faced man banged his walking-stick on the pavement.

"I conceived it possible," continued Coverley, "that you might have put out your hand, Mr. Clare, in a sudden revengeful impulse, and taken the papers, in order to have some hold on Sir William."

"Still harping on Sir William," murmured the actor, and his toad's eye seemed void of speculation or feeling; but suddenly its blink of intelligence came. "Two sealed envelopes containing papers which, I suppose, in the language of lost advertisements, 'are of no value except to their owner.'"

"Precisely," said Coverley.

"Well, sir," continued Clare, and an unusual glow came upon the vast expanse of cheek, "it seems to me exceedingly ungentlemanly to persist in asking me questions about two sealed envelopes, of the existence of which I was ignorant until this moment. I am an actor, sir," he added, with proud dignity, casting the while a side-glance at Coverley's companion, to note how he was affected by an "exit" which ought to have brought down the house, "not a thief!" and he pushed the stage-door to enter.

But not yet was his exit made. ("Ask him to have a drink," whispered the Squire to Coverley.) "I am sorry to have hurt you," said Coverley, taking a step nearer the actor; "my excuse is that I was—and am—completely at a loss to guess how the papers disappeared except under the circumstances I have named. To show, Mr. Clare, that there is no ill-will on either side on account of an unavoidable

inquiry, Mr. Pierrepont and I beg to ask you to come and join us in a glass of something, if you can spare the time." Coverley wondered at his own formality and precision; were they caused by listening to the actor, or by contiguity to the theatre?

"Mr. Pierrepont?" said Clare, returning. "Sir William's brother, the Squire?"

"The same," answered the Squire gruffly.

"Then," said Mr. Clare, "I don't mind if I do."

("Knew the fellow would!" exclaimed the Squire in Coverley's ear, as they turned away from the stage-door together. "Sort of fellow who can always wash down an insult or an injury with whisky and water.")

"I am not 'on' in this piece," said Mr. Clare, with a jocund solemnity, as he led the way (with accustomed feet) across to a quiet tavern; "consequently I have abundance of time on my hands."

"You travelled," said the Squire, across Coverley, "up to London yesterday evening, I understand, in the company of my brother, Sir William."

"I did, Squire," answered Clare.

"Can you tell me, then," asked the Squire, "where my brother is staying?"

"It would take more than I know to tell you that, Squire," answered Clare. "But I would advise you to have a word with my sister; she may have something to tell you; indeed, I believe she has."

By that time they were standing in the light of the private bar of the tavern. The Squire glanced with concern at Clare, but the blank wall of countenance revealed nothing, and the Squire said nothing. Presently, when they had consumed a drink and exchanged an indifferent word or two, Clare looked at the clock and returned to the subject of his sister.

"If you care to see my sister, this is a very good time. The curtain has just gone up, and beginners

are on, but my sister doesn't go on for half an hour. What do you say, Squire?"

"Yes, I'll go with you to see her."

Clare led the way into the theatre by the stage-door. When he had satisfied Cerberus of his business, he led on down a long, narrow passage that seemed to wend into the bowels of the earth, an impression that was increased by the hot vapours that rushed up about them and the lurid glow as of Avernus that began to appear beyond. But before they reached Avernus, they turned aside and were led up a steeply twisting staircase, and then along another passage filled as with the breath of a burning fiery furnace, and with not very remote sounds of voices and of many-headed laughter and many-handed applause. At the end of the passage was a grating through which Coverley peeped. He was amazed to discover that he was somewhere near the roof of the theatre, just by a corner of the top of the stage, and that he looked down upon performers and audience both. Another turning down a shorter passage, and Clare knocked at a door.

"Come in," rang out a clear female voice.

Clare opened the door and looked in. "It's all right, Kitty," said he. Then, turning to the Squire and Coverley, "Gentlemen," said he, throwing wide the door, "Lady Pierrepont!"

"What is this?" exclaimed the Squire, stopping dead on the threshold. "What the deuce do you mean, sir?"

"I mean, Squire," said Mr. Clare, "that this, my sister,—if you did not know it before,—is your brother Sir William's wife,—is, in fact, Lady Pierrepont."

The Squire and his companion stood and stared, and said not a word. The room was a tolerably large one for "behind the scenes"; there were three dressing tables and as many chairs, and twice as many gas-jets (one with a reflector being on either side of

each table); and in the midst of this effulgence of light and disarray of dresses and dressing paraphernalia stood a woman in eighteenth-century costume, in powdered wig and patches, frill and furbelow. She was probably not unhandsome out of her war-paint, but she was made up to look a raddled and belated horror; and she ogled and she simpered as became her part.

"Law!" she exclaimed. "It's my gentleman's brother! It's the other Stoney, come to look up poor Kitty Clare. Come, Zach," she said to her brother, "set the gentlemen chairs, and take your tragedy face out of it."

Zach (or Clare) placed two chairs and went out; but the Squire still stood erect, and Coverley did likewise.

"Squire," said Coverley, "shall I go, and leave you to speak to the lady alone?"

"No, stay," answered the Squire.

"Ah, Stoney," said the lady archly, wagging her head and shaking her ringed fingers at him, "you were not always so afraid of being left *tête-à-tête* with Kitty Clare. What high-spirited, rackety young devils you and your brother, my gentleman, were, to be sure. Oh, go along with you, you naughty man!"

"Madam," said the Squire, "let us be serious. Don't let us play at being a Punch and Judy show. Your brother introduced you as Lady Pierrepont, my brother's wife: is that description correct, madam?"

The woman's appearance and manner changed; she became a loud, passionate virago. "And why should it not be? Do you mean I am not fit to be your brother's wife? Fitter, I should think, than he is to be my husband—the poor-spirited, cowardly cur that he is!"

"Madam," said the Squire, "I judge no woman: I

only wish to know the facts. You were married, I presume, under the name of Stonebridge?"

"Yes; Stonebridge. A pretty name—isn't it?—a nice name!—when Pierrepont was my rightful name all the time. All these years he has been keeping me out of my rights. But I'll be even with him yet: you mark my words! He hasn't done with me. I've kept quiet up till now: it was only the other night I found out who he was, when you and he were here in the theatre." (The Squire recalled with a pang that he had almost compelled his brother to go to the theatre.) "But if he thinks I am going to sit down under the insult he's put on me, he's jolly well mistaken! Before God and man I am his lawful, wedded wife,—I am Lady Pierrepont,—and I'll move heaven and earth to make him acknowledge me. A wife's place is by her husband's side."

"I quite agree with you," said the Squire; "but heaven and earth cannot make a man keep his wife at his side, if he sees proper reasons for not having her there."

"And what proper reasons has he, I should like to know? I am as good as he is any day—the mean hound! Stonebridge, indeed! If it hadn't been for his tying me up with his marriage, I might have been a countess or a duchess. There's more than one girl I knew that's a countess, and that didn't have half my chances. You don't suppose your brother was the only lover I had? And what I married him for I don't know, except that I liked him; he was handsome, and had a way with him that made me think he was a swell, in spite of his Stonebridge. And I must say he made love better than anybody else I ever knew. But if you think," she exclaimed, in another gust of passion, "that I have ever given him a handle against me for a reason, you're mistaken. I have been careful of that, I can tell you. No woman in my position could be more careful."

"Of course, of that," said the Squire, "I am incapable of judging. I suppose your husband, my brother, made you an allowance?"

"A paltry pittance of seven pounds a week. What is that for the wife of Sir William Pierrepont?"

"May I ask, madam," said the Squire, "if you have any children?"

A blush made itself evident through the thick paint and powder, and a tear—which did not seem an acting tear—sprang in her eye.

"I had a beautiful boy," she said: "he has been in his father's care since he was three years old; he said he could not let him be brought up by *me*. Oh, your brother made it very hard for me. He made no allowances for me." For a moment it seemed that she would give way to the simple feelings of woman and mother, but with a sudden recovery she was her former blatant self again. "But I shall pay him out! I swear I will! He has not settled with me yet, if he thinks he has. But I suppose you think with my gentleman that I'm not fit to appear as Lady Pierrepont among your stuck-up relations down in the country."

"You've seen my brother, then?" said the Squire.

"Yes, I've seen him. And I'm not likely to forget it; nor is he either. Do you know," she broke out, "what he came to me to say? No; perhaps you don't. He came to say that he is so ashamed of me that, sooner than have me down there as his wife, he had cut the place and his business altogether, and come to London, and he is so very fond of me that he would let me live with him on two or three pounds a week of his own earnings. That's what he came to say, and he soon had my answer—the insolent, insulting beast!"

"You had sent your brother down, I suppose," said the Squire, "to threaten him?"

"I had sent my brother down to say that I meant

to be Lady Pierrepont down there, or have a good equivalent."

"Poor William!" murmured the Squire.

"You're like all the men. You side with each other in everything. Not one of you will say, 'Poor Kitty!' But he'll soon tire of trying to live in London on his own earnings, and then my time will come."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the Squire. "He's not going to try that, is he?"

"You didn't know? Yes; he's going to do that, he *says*,—to spite me. But he'll tire of his little game before I will; he's sure to go back, and then it'll be my turn again."

A call-boy dashed open the door—"Lady Oglethorpe, *please*."

"That's me," said she, again smiling; "I must go. Good-bye, Stoney. Come and see me again, old man, and bring your friend there, to whom I have *not* been introduced."

"Can you give me my brother's address?" the Squire called after her.

"No; I can't. I don't know it," was her reply.

CHAPTER XI

FURTHER OF EVELEGH'S THEFT

WHEN Lady Oglethorpe (or Lady Pierrepont) disappeared, the Squire and Coverley looked about them, and discovered that Clare had disappeared too. But there was the call-boy eyeing them and whistling softly.

"Want to get out, gentlemen?" said he briskly. "You foller me; I'll show you the way."

He sped along down the passage, pretending to catch flies the while on the wall. As they passed the grating at the corner, again there came distinctly the sound of voices on the stage,—Lady Oglethorpe's could easily be distinguished,—and again the crackle of laughter and the rush of applause, as if that were the ear of the house. Along the other passage and down the stairs spun the boy, followed in haste by the Squire and Coverley, lest they should lose him, and so lose themselves.

"I mustn't come no farther, gents," said the boy. "I'm wanted on the stige. You keep right along 'ere and you'll come to the stige-door. Thank'ee, sir," he said, in response to a touch in his palm.

In a second or two more the stage-door closed behind them, and they took a deep breath of the open air.

"That," said the Squire, "is a terrible place!" They walked away out of the by-lane. "You heard all she said, Coverley?" observed the Squire.

"I did, Squire," answered Coverley, "and I am sorry that I did."

"It is no matter," said the Squire; "you will keep all you heard to yourself, I know. She seems a real tartar of a woman, Coverley."

"Yes," said Coverley; "but she has her good points. She might have threatened to come down and worry you."

"She might."

"And she seemed genuinely affected about her child."

The Squire stopped short. "Perhaps you would like to see Lady Pierrepont act on the stage, and compare the two performances?"

"No, thank you, Squire," answered Coverley; "I've had enough of the theatre for some time."

"So have I," said the Squire, with emphasis, "and of this London, which I grow to hate more and more. Whenever I hear in church, 'Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?' I think of London. Look here, Coverley, what's the time?" He pulled out his own watch. "We can do nothing more to find my brother if he's determined to hide; and a Sunday in London is an abomination. I feel, Coverley, that I would like to be in the sweet air of home, and to sit in my own place in church and pray for my own brother, and for all tempted and tried creatures: 'Lord have mercy upon us, miserable sinners.' What do you say, Coverley? Shall we make a dash for it and go home?"

"With pleasure, Squire," said Coverley. "I'm game."

"There's a train to the Junction at half-past nine," said the Squire, hastily summarising their procedure; "get there about eleven, a trap home, take another hour, about; you put up with me to-night."

So they hurried to their hotel, paid their bill up to

next morning, and in little more than half an hour were in the train, bound for home. When they were rushing out of the squalid London suburbs, the Squire, looking from the window of the carriage into the dark and comfortless night (it was chill October), murmured, "Poor William! Dear, dear, how a hot young fellow may with the best intentions ruin his life! He must have been rather younger than you; but just a young fellow from Cambridge like you. Thought, I suppose, he couldn't live without Kitty; married her, and presently found he couldn't live with her; and now there's this. Life is a queer muddle!" That was all the Squire said about his brother, and thenceforward there was silence between them.

At midnight, Timmins was roused from slumber sweet and baccalauric by the clangour of the bell in his room, the handle of which was at the front door. He put his head out of window, and was hailed by his master, who had a companion. In half an hour all was again still and dark in Pierrepont Hall.

Next morning, long before the hour of breakfast at the Hall, Coverley was up and out, tramping through the fallen leaves of the avenue towards home. Like the Squire, he had no affection for London; so, in spite of disappointment with the result of his expedition to town, it was with a grateful and joyous outgoing of the heart that he heard the bleat of his sheep on the hill and the bark of his dog bounding to greet him. Two or three hours later—still with a grateful and joyous outgoing of the heart—he was riding into the town to church. He was conscientious about his attendance that Sunday morning; for, apart from his feelings of duty and devotion, he had a quick expectation of seeing Jenny Evelegh, and something of a hope that Philip Pierrepont might have news of Sir William. In neither was he disappointed. First, he met Philip as he approached the church.

The young man gave him a look which he never forgot — a look as of new attention and respect, as if he were reckoning up his principal, interest and amount.

"How do you do?" said he, with a note of harsh resolution and restraint. "Got back then? Did you find Sir William?"

"No, we did not," answered Coverley.

"I thought you wouldn't. Nor found out anything about your lost papers, I suppose?"

"Nor that either," answered Coverley, feeling somehow that he would do well to be angry; for he suspected a hint of elation in Philip's voice, and could not guess why it should be there, unless it were out of sheer "cussedness."

"I've had a letter from Sir William," said Philip.

"Then you know where he is?"

"I don't. He gives no address; the letter was posted in London, W.C., and he merely gives me some business directions." In saying that Philip gave Coverley a very straight, steady look, the meaning of which the latter tried to compass. Then he abruptly said "Good morning," and went his way.

In the afternoon, the Squire came to Coverley with fuller news which he had received from Philip.

"Philip," said he, "knows as much as we do about the marriage,—and more, I believe," he added, with a touch of pique; "though I daresay there was a full letter to me about everything among those lost papers," he added contritely. "And my brother has no intention of coming back," he continued, with sadness, "and he begs that we won't try to find him out! It's a strange business, whatever comes of it. What are we going to say? What explanation are we going to give of his disappearance? I don't know any more than Adam!"

They then consulted together what further ought to be done for the recovery of the lost papers, and

they could think of nothing better than to ask, through Philip, the aid of the bank in issuing advertisements of the loss. Next morning Coverley called upon Philip for that purpose; and at once Philip agreed to issue handbills and to prepare an advertisement for the local paper, to the effect that on the night of Friday the —th inst., on the railway between East Dormus and the Junction, or on the road between East Dormus and Holly Bush Farm, there had been lost two blue sealed envelopes containing papers, and that whoever had found and would bring the same to Pierrepont's Bank would be "liberally rewarded."

In the meanwhile, what of John Evelegh and his theft? It was significant of Evelegh's condition of mind that he had not gone to church on Sunday, for Evelegh had found he had a conscience. That that discovery should have come after, and not before, wrong-doing may seem strange to those who have merely cut-and-dried notions of psychology, or to whom right and wrong are fixed ideas with fixed results when reduced to action. To such it may be amazing to say that sin has often the effect of a tonic upon a dull conscience. Until that Friday evening Evelegh had been as unaware of possessing a conscience as of having a stomach, for both had acted healthily and naturally, without temptation to excess or outrage. He had never before taken anything that was not his own; he had always been unswervingly truthful even to rudeness; he had always spoken out the word that was in him without fear: it had never occurred to him to do or be otherwise. His conscience had hitherto proceeded with him as simply and contentedly as his body, and now that he had suddenly thrust a stick between the legs of it, and for the first time tripped it up, it looked about it in surprise and fear.

For the purpose of this story, the most noteworthy

consequence of that at first was the new regard in which Evelegh began to view his daughter Jenny. He began to live less in his own esteem, and more in her estimation of him. That one creature of his own had such a belief in him that she had not for a moment suspected him of theft, and he was very grateful, while he thought with dismay of the necessity of lies, evasion, or silence, if Coverley's loss were mentioned again, as it was sure to be.

That very Friday evening, while he sat apparently wrapped in moody contemplation and slowly sinking wrath, while he seemed to regard only the thin blue smoke from his pipe, he really gave the liveliest attention to his daughter, and inwardly deprecated any resentment she might feel of his conduct. He observed her narrowly as she sat over her sewing, and every glance she gave, every word she uttered, awoke in him a vague dread. To escape from her reproachful presence he went early to bed. He went to bed and closed his eyes, but sleep did not come to him. His slow thought, which had for years brooded in narrow selfishness on his losses,—losses renewed and multiplied as regularly as the seasons,—was now roused and fluttered up. It swept over the whole field of his view, but ever returned to circle closer and closer about his theft. He doubted he was treating his daughter harshly,—and she had always been a good girl,—but he could not admit the thought of Coverley in connection with her; Coverley, his one malignant enemy, whom he had sworn never to forgive! whom he had at length managed to injure (and a man whom we injure we strive to find more and more reason to hate, to justify our conduct), but in injuring whom he had contrived to wound and debase himself! And so his attention burned more and more around Coverley and his own theft. The papers were still in his pocket; he had had no temptation to look at them, not even to read the superscription of the

envelope; but the presence of them attracted and seemed to scorch his thought. He strove to forget them; he refused to have any knowledge of them; he would put them away and hide them deep, so that they should be as if they were not, as if, at least, they had never been taken possession of by his hand. To that end he slipped out of bed, lit his candle, opened his old oak "secretary" (which had been in his family for generations, and which someone had generously bought in at the sale and sent to him), took his coat from its peg, and then passed the packet, without looking at it, into a deep inner drawer of which only himself knew. He locked the drawer, and locked the "secretary," and returned to bed with an almost light heart; for now, was it not all the same as if he had not stolen the papers, as if they had merely become lost, as if they had been dropped into a hole or into a ditch, which would never have been troubled with qualms of conscience in swallowing them up? And thus comforted, he slept.

Next morning came Coverley's discomposing inquiry concerning his papers, the issue of which provoked a new contradictory feeling towards Coverley. The young man did not seem for a moment to have suspected that he might have stolen the papers, and he could not but be grateful again for the absence of suspicion, and his resentment against him slackened a little. But while his hatred sank, his fear grew, fear as much of what he himself would feel if Coverley knew of the theft as of what Coverley might say.

When the handbills of the loss appeared on walls and in shop-windows, Evelegh hid himself at home; he could not endure the sight of them—they seemed to publish abroad his theft. It may be wondered why he did not take that opportunity of restitution; but, apart from the facts that restitution at that late date to a simple, stupid man like Evelegh appeared

impossible without confession, and that his hatred still burned against Coverley, there is this to be considered: a slow, obstinate man like Evelegh out of mere sluggishness persists in a course on which he is once set out, and lets be a thing which he has once done.

It was while Evelegh was withdrawn from the sight of the handbills that Squire Pierrepont came to him in haste with a cheering offer of occupation, which thrust his theft far into the background of his attention.

"I'm going to turn out that rascal Timpenny from the Home Farm, Evelegh," said the Squire, evidently in the subsidence of a considerable fume. "What do you think I've found the beggar doing? Selling the straw off the farm! the straw!"

"No, Squire! Sure-lie!" exclaimed Evelegh.

"Fact! And I find he's been playing these rigs all the three years he's been there! Taking everything out of the land, and putting nothing in! That's downright theft and robbery, Evelegh, isn't it?"

"It is, Squire," said the agitated Evelegh, stroking his mouth to keep his lips steady.

"Well, I'm going to send him packing! Out he goes at Christmas! And now, Evelegh, I've been thinking I'll have no more tenants at the Home Farm, but you and I will work it together; eh? What do you say?"

"It's kind and neighbourly in you, Squire, to put it like that, and if I must work under some man, I'd rayther work under you than under any man, as I may say."

"Stuff! Nonsense! Work under me? We'll work it together, I tell you! Well, it's a bargain. I'll think over the money question, and look in upon you again. And I daresay the rascal Timpenny will be glad to go before Christmas. In that

case, you'll be able to move into the house pretty soon."

"I am minded, Squire," said Evelegh, "that I hev to thank you for sending me the two-three things from the sale. I'm not a dab at the words o' book-learning, Squire, but I'll never forget it." And the poor farmer's lips quivered, and he swallowed a lump in his throat.

"Things from the sale, Evelegh? Me? You're mistaken. I wasn't at your sale; I was in London at the time."

"You don't hide it from me, Squire," said Evelegh, shaking his head at him. "Timmins was there."

"Oh, Timmins was there, was he? Well, Evelegh, I suspect the person that sent you the things was a better friend than me, after all. Good-bye."

Evelegh, in relating to Jenny the Squire's kindness and his repudiation of the credit of having bought and sent the two or three things, asked her aid in guessing who the person could be that had been "a better friend." But he was so taken up with his grudging surprise that he had not to be grateful to the Squire for that, and his speculations as to the right person, that he did not note Jenny's silence.

"I'd rayther be beholden to the Squire than to anybody," he said; "but it might hev been Sir William did it. Squire said 'person'; might hev been not a man at all, but a woman. Might hev been Miss Philippa. Miss Philippa and me had allus a liking for one another. Ay, I'll bet it were Miss Philippa."

And the preoccupied man did not note his daughter's restless eyes and her panting desire to speak, upon which she put a violent restraint. She would not mention the name of the one person who, she was convinced, was the "better friend," for fear

of an explosion of her father's wrath. But she went to her little room, and sobbed and cried out in relief of her restraint, "Oh, he is so patient and kind, and father is so angry and hard, I cannot bear it! I cannot bear it!"

CHAPTER XII

A RUN ON THE BANK

WHO can tell whence a public suspicion arises, and how it becomes epidemic? It seemed, indeed, that when that word "*Absconded*" had been uttered in the bank parlour, birds of the air had been listening at the opening of the window, had carried the word over the country-side, and had mischievously twittered on the trees and about the eaves of homesteads, merely in confidence to each other and with no intent to communicate the news to the dull creature man, "Sir William!—William! Absconded! Absconded!" It was remembered that Sir William had not been at the bank last market-day except for an hour at the end, that he had been in London on business for nearly a fortnight, and it became generally known that he had hurried back to London almost as soon as he had left. At a time of shaky credit—when the fame of the Bank of England itself was aspersed, and a trusted old bank in the West of England had shut up and disappeared like a new shop—these were disquieting thoughts.

On the morning of the next market-day there was still nothing but disquiet and doubt. But it gradually became known that Sir William had not returned; that fact and other facts were discussed by heated groups,—even the handbills advertising Coverley's loss were thought to "mean more than they said,"—alarm bred alarm, and one person after another stole away to withdraw his money, thinking he was the

only one. But every one who went out of the bank provoked at least two others to enter. Secret alarm rapidly became a public panic. At three o'clock there was a row of people at the bank counter; and at half-past three there was a double row; the doors of the bank closed at four.

Whatever else Philip Pierrepont might be, or might not be, he was a man of business and of cool resolution. The chief cashier had come to him early with his fear that there was going to be a "run" on the bank.

"We must at all costs," said Philip, "let it have way. Don't try to hinder it, or you'll make it worse; and, for Heaven's sake, don't look frightened and nervous."

"Shall one of the clerks help us to pay out?"

"Heavens! no," exclaimed Philip. "The three of you as usual will be enough; let the rest of the office go on with their work as if there were nothing happening out of the common. The surest way to make people alarmed is to look alarmed yourself. Don't pay out in a hurry, and don't be so slow as to make people impatient. And let one of the clerks come to me at intervals of five minutes to tell me how things are going."

At half-past three progress was reported to Philip: the chief cashier sent word that he might go on till four o'clock at the present rate of paying out, but that there were already enough people in the bank to keep him going till five, and more were still entering. Philip meditated an instant, and told the clerk who brought the message to get his hat. He then went to the safe and took out some bank-notes and a hundred gold sovereigns, and put them into a bag with the usual slip of paper on which payments into banks are noted down.

"Take this," said he, "and run to the Pierrepont Arms, and find my uncle the Squire. If you

find him, tell him how things are,—you understand?—and ask him to come and pay that in at once; if you can't find him, come and pay that in yourself. And if you should meet Mr. Coverley, tell him of this, and ask him from me to come and pay in any small sum he may have upon him, just to show his confidence in the bank. This way; get over the wall, and along the back lane."

The clerk, doubtless, wondered why Mr. Coverley should be singled out to join the Squire in that demonstration of confidence; but he merely said, "Yes, sir," and went the way Philip indicated, which was through the window. The clerk dismissed, Philip publicly appeared behind the cashier's counter. He greeted by name one or two of the men waiting to withdraw their money, but made no observation concerning the phenomenon of so large an assembly. The men looked somewhat shamefaced and constrained under his careless eye, and answered him in awkward, halting sentences; for the panic had not yet transgressed the bounds of good behaviour; and the throng had not yet lost good humour. An old fellow, when he had withdrawn his money at one desk, went straightway to pay it in again at another.

"I only wanted," said he, "to make sure that the money was there. It's all right enough. Good afternoon, Mr. Philip."

At that there was some constrained laughter, but no other moved from his place. All looked a little ashamed, but silently maintained their intention of withdrawal.

It was close upon four o'clock, and the chief cashier, perspiring with terror, was casting looks of appeal on Philip. What would he do? Would he continue paying out after the hour had struck? If he did, it would be ruin! The bank would have to declare before all these waiting ones were paid that it was necessary to "suspend payment"! It

wanted but a minute to the stroke of the hour when a young man (the clerk whom Philip had sent out) dashed into the bank, and went to the paying-in desk. Philip himself went to receive him. All watched the gold poured out of the bag and weighed, a handful of bank-notes counted, and the slip of addition initialled and filed quietly and regularly by Philip; the effect was soothing, if not absolutely reassuring. The hour struck.

"Gentlemen," said Philip carelessly, with a glance at the clock, "you are too late. It's time to close the bank."

At that there were murmurs of surprise. "We've been here a-waiting more than half an hour! I mean to hev my money!" But there was nothing like unanimity of insistence.

"To-morrow morning," said Philip quietly, "you can have what money you wish. You can't expect that the whole business of the bank is to be deranged because you choose to come in a crowd this afternoon. It would take two hours more to get through the lot of you. Good afternoon, gentlemen."

The crowd was not agreed. Some went at once; others lingered; but Philip had the tone and look of a man who must be obeyed, and with a gentle urgency of hand here, and a civil word and smile there, he got his clients all out, and shut the door.

"Thank God!" he exclaimed.

"We could not have gone on another quarter of an hour, Mr. Philip!" said the chief cashier, wiping his forehead.

"Now, I must arrange for to-morrow," said Philip; "the run is not by any means over."

"Do you think not?" asked the alarmed cashier.

"No. It will be much worse to-morrow. The bigger and less timid people will be coming in; and most of those that have gone away now will stay

in the town all night, you may be sure, to be ready for the morning."

Philip retired to the room that was known as Sir William's, and sat down at Sir William's writing-table to consider what he must do to meet the demands of the morrow. There was not room for much oscillation of judgment; either the bank must suspend payment, or it must get into its coffers—beg, borrow, or steal—such a sum as would enable it to tide over the Saturday and prepare for Monday. But where could such a sum be got?—for it must be a large sum, say ten thousand pounds! To borrow of another bank was out of the question; there was no time for such a transaction, were it otherwise feasible. Could money be borrowed at all in time for the opening of the bank in the morning? Certainly the Squire could not lend, for all his pecuniary affairs were in the hands of the bank. The rich Mr. Swinton could not be asked to lend, for, spite of his friendliness, he might take alarm; moreover, such an appeal at such a moment would put in jeopardy another scheme which Philip cherished against the Swinton wealth. There was but one other—and Philip smote his hands conclusively together, and a smile lit up his face as he thought of that person—his second cousin, Philippa!—Miss Philippa, the eccentric!

In choosing Philippa for his purpose, Philip showed the kind of business capacity which moderns most admire, and which among moderns proves certainly most successful. In determining how he would "get at" his cousin he showed a genius for high finance worthy of the hero of the "Liberator,"—a supreme disregard of gentlemanly usage and honourable sentiment, and a cynical appreciation of the foibles, the vagaries, and the conceits of human nature. He was named Philip after his cousin—he made small account of that: it might serve to introduce him to

the lady; but he knew—he had heard—that his uncle, Sir William, had jilted Miss Philippa, and he believed that in Sir William's recent letter from London was communicated the reason. He saw that he had his uncle's letter in his pocket, and set out at once to interview Philippa.

Miss Philippa Pierrepont lived in an old house a mile or more from East Dormus, on the side remote from the Pierrepont road. The house and grounds were called Coldham, which the small wits of the town insisted on pronouncing as two words, and Miss Philippa occupied them in company with a tribe of fat pugs and a number of fat domestics, of whom only one was a man, and he combined in his own fat self the offices of butler, coachman, and squire of dames. Miss Philippa was believed to detest the males of her kind; but she had been heard to say that it was always wise to have a man about, for the sake of appearances, in this censorious world. Because of such free expression of opinion she was said to be "strong-minded"; and she was called a "character" because she affected an odd mannishness of dress and demeanour. This was the appearance she presented when she showed herself to her admiring and cringing townsfolk:—she wore her hair cut short, and on her head a species of hat which only a lady might venture to describe; her upper garment was a compromise between a lady's jacket and a man's coat, whose breast-pocket obtrusively displayed a man's coloured silk handkerchief, into which Miss Philippa would sometimes trumpet in public loud enough to shake the nerves of feeble-minded ladies; and her nether garment was a short skirt, at which, when she sat down, she had a habit of plucking, as a man pulls at the knees of his trousers to keep them from "bagging": the effect of that action scandalised the proper ladies of Miss Philippa's company, for it revealed the stout boots in which she cased her feet,

and something more than a coquettish extent of stocking. She had, moreover, a habit of stroking her lip and chin downward, as if she had but newly shaved a beard; and she said "H'm!—Ha!" in a tone that smote terror to the hearts of delinquent little boys. Withal, Miss Philippa, though stout, was not unhandsome still; and there was a shrewd and humorous expression in her eye, which suggested that something of her abrupt mannishness was calculated, in order to frighten women and to get her own way with men; for a brusque man may be bullied, but a brusque woman carries all before her.

Into this lady's presence Philip was shown, and he was greeted by the yapping of several fat pugs and by the cracking of Miss Philippa's dog-whip. Philip looked round him curiously; he had often met (or seen) Miss Philippa in the town, but he had not been in her house twice in his life that he could remember.

"To what do I owe the pleasure of this visit, cousin?" asked Miss Philippa. "Be quiet, Dinah!" and she cracked her whip again.

"A matter of business, Philippa," answered Philip, thinking that the laconic way was best.

"Oh!" said Philippa. "Sit down." She sat down herself and plucked at her skirt. "Go on."

"We have had a serious run on the bank this afternoon."

"Why do you come to tell me that? I don't bank with you, and I'm not a banker."

"I thought, Philippa, it might interest you to know the cause of the run."

"Oh! What's that?"

"The absence of Sir William, and the growing belief that he has absconded."

"And has he? He has never done that, surely?" and the ineradicable, irrepressible nature of woman showed itself in her flushed cheek and her quickened attention.

"He has, but not in the sense I take you to mean. He has gone away and hid himself, and he has written to me that he is not coming back—and all on account of a woman, Philippa."

"Of a what? Stuff and nonsense! Your uncle William would never go out of his way for a woman, much less run away with one! He always had the blood of a fish in his veins!"

"He has not run away with a woman, Philippa," said Philip, with a smile.

"Mercy on us! What for did you say so, then?"

"I said, cousin, he had gone away *on account* of a woman. I might run out of this room on account of this dog,"—indicating one of the pugs trying to catch the savour of his leg,—"but I do not, therefore, run away with him—or her."

"H'm!" said Philippa, considering him shrewdly, and stroking her lip and chin in the way I have described; "you have a little wit of your own. Don't be too free with it, cousin; it's a fault in young people that they are too lavish with any little commodity of that kind they may find they have about them. But go on and tell me about this woman without any more questioning."

"I think," said Philip, "if I read you Sir William's letter,—which told me the first I knew about the woman,—that will be the best and completest way." And he took the letter from his pocket.

"One moment. Sir William wrote you that in confidence?"

"And I read it to you in confidence, cousin. I can tell you the substance of it, if you object to hear it read."

Philippa glanced at him, to make another note of the manner of man he was. "You may as well read," said she, and plucked at the knee of her skirt.

Philip read and Philippa listened without comment, until he read Sir William's succinct story of the mis-

take made in his hot, reckless youth, of his secret marriage under an assumed name, and of the disaster which had just overtaken him in the discovery of his identity by his wife. The pain which the narration gave him was evident in his short, *staccato* sentences.

"Poor William!" exclaimed Philippa, when Philip had finished reading. "I must confess I had not thought him capable of doing such a thing. But," she continued defiantly, "I think all the better of him for it. A man who can throw himself away on a woman is a man to my liking. It's playing the fool, perhaps; but then we all play the fool in some way or other, and I like that way best. And William has made up his mind to disappear completely, for the credit of the family and the bank. Well, I respect him for that; most men would wear their 'rue with a difference.' Do you ever read books, cousin? Or is all your time taken up with your ledgers and the care of your handsome person?"

"I have a little time to spare for reading," answered Philip, with self-possession.

"Can you tell me, then, where my quotation about 'rue' comes from?"

"Ophelia uses the phrase in *Hamlet*, doesn't she?"

"Right, young man. You may go up one. Is that all William says?" she asked, glancing towards the letter.

"That's all about his wife," answered Philip. "He communicates his intentions about the bank; he leaves it all for me to carry on,—stipulating only that seven pounds per week be sent to a certain London solicitor, until said solicitor informs me that the money need be no longer paid."

"That will be the income he allows his wife, of course."

"Well—yes, I suppose so."

"Suppose so? Do you doubt it, when your uncle has written to you that he means to live in London

on his own earnings? I see you are one of the new young men, cousin; you are cynical, and believe in nothing."

"I believe in you, cousin," answered Philip, with a smile.

"Fiddle-de-dee! You believe in me to the extent of my purse."

Again Philip smiled. "Ought not the length of the purse to be the gauge for a banker's regard?"

"You're frank, at anyrate," said Philippa. "And it may be fortunate for you that I don't mind how anybody regards me. But tell me: do you know anything more of this woman? Has she any children?"

"That," said Philip leisurely, as he folded away his uncle's letter, "I cannot say."

"You don't know what she's like, I suppose?"

"Well," answered Philip, "I have heard from the Squire, who interviewed her a week ago, when he went up to London to look for his brother."

"Oh!" said Philippa. "Well?"

"The Squire says she is still handsome, though not anything like so handsome as she was five-and-twenty years ago."

"Why, of course not. It's like an idiot of a man to say that. But the Squire knew her when she was young, then?"

"She was all the rage then, I understand," answered Philip. "The adored of all the young men about town — a burlesque actress, named — let me see — what?"

"Out with it," exclaimed Philippa brusquely. "You remember well enough; trust a young man to remember the name of a famous stage beauty."

"Kitty Clare, I think, was the name."

"Oh, she?" exclaimed Philippa, adding with a kind of contemptuous tenderness, "Poor little fool! And William fell in love with her? I'm not surprised at

that; she was very lovely. And I'm as little surprised that they didn't get on together; for William, in spite of all his hidden fire, which I suppose I must now admit he had, was a great formalist. Poor wretch! William must have given her, with the best intentions, many a sore heart, if she cared for him at all. Men never understand women, even the silliest. What a mess love makes of life! Young man, never fall in love; but now that I look at you, you're not very likely to. I thought you at first very like your uncle, but he had a better mouth than you, and better eyes. Good gracious me!" she exclaimed, suddenly flapping out her great handkerchief and trumpeting into it so that she set all her pugs off barking. "Here I am twaddling about love, when the affairs of the bank are waiting. Tell me about them."

Philip in clear business language told the story of the "run" that day, his successful termination of it by a soothing ruse and by the closing of the bank, and his fears for a worse "run" on the morrow, while Philippa listened attentively, ejaculating many a curt "H'm!" and "Ha!"

"The bank must be saved, of course," said she, rising with decision in her voice and manner. "The family must not be disgraced. Leave the method to me. I'll be with you by the opening hour to-morrow. Good-night, cousin."

CHAPTER XIII

PHILIPPA TO THE RESCUE

PHILIP'S suspicion proved correct; most of those who had been turned out of the bank moneyless, stayed in the town to be at hand for the opening of the bank in the morning. Their purpose was not kept secret, and they made the night vocal with their carousals in the inns, till the whole town was in a ferment of alarm and expectation. In the morning the excitement was more subdued, though not less extensive. By eight o'clock (the bank should open at nine) there was a crowd against the closed doors like that at a theatre, and every minute others kept arriving, breathless and terrified, from the country; how the panic had spread so wide in so short a time passed comprehension.

"Is Pierrepont's truly broke?" was the anxious question of many even who had nothing to lose; and they would gaze at the heavy closed doors and the barred windows, and run their eyes over the whole front of the bank, as if to see if there was a fracture visible. "They say Sir William's runned away. If the bank en't a-breaking, what's he runned away for? That's what I says, and what I wants to know!"

About half-past eight the Squire arrived in haste, and passed in at the side door with anxious face. Philip had rooms at the bank, and the Squire was soon in his presence.

"Only heard of it this morning!" said the Squire. "And I thought you might want my advice.

William's absence has done it, somehow, I suppose? Are you going to open? Can you get through to-day? It's a short day; there's that to be said for it."

Philip was pale but self-possessed. "I have a conviction we'll be all right."

"Conviction?" exclaimed the alarmed Squire. "Man alive! Don't you know?"

"Well, yes; I know," said Philip. "I appealed to Miss Philippa: she'll see me through."

"Philippa?" exclaimed the Squire, looking hard and searchingly on Philip. "That was a very smart idea! In that case, though, I think I can be of no use here." (The Squire had a considerable prejudice against Philippa.)

"I don't think you would be of use in any case, uncle," said Philip; "if you will forgive me for saying so. The only useful person at present is one who brings money—not advice."

"I daresay you're right, Philip. Good morning." And he went off in some dudgeon.

It wanted but five minutes of nine, and no Miss Philippa had yet appeared. Philip still maintained his faith in her, though he was become rather uneasy.

The chief cashier, who was in a gelatinous condition, timidly inquired if it was of any use to open the doors with so little in hand to pay out; but Philip firmly answered that the doors must be opened. It was upon the stroke of nine when rapid, rattling wheels sounded upon the pavement of the market-place, and an increasing roar of "Hooray!" was heard. This was what was happening:—A stout horse, urged to a gallop by Miss Philippa's own hands (while her fat coachman sat impassive by her side), was tearing a dogcart along the square, escorted by a cohort of racing boys. She drove up to the bank, and dashed ruthlessly into the waiting crowd, making individuals skip. Her fat coachman jumped down

with amazing alacrity and hammered on the side door till he was red in the face.

"Is there anybody here," asked Miss Philippa, "who has not got a banking account? If there is, he shall have more thanks from me than any man who has. Ah, you, sir? Very well, just be so good as hold my horse till I get these bags out."

There was a sputter of laughter from the crowd at Miss Philippa's "witty way," which died away into a low hiss of interest and astonishment (as of water putting out a spark of fire) at sight of Philippa dragging out from beneath the seat heavy chinking canvas bags.

"Let me help you, Miss Philippa," said a young shopkeeper, stepping out from the crowd.

Philippa looked at him. "You, you booby!" said she; "do you think I would trust gold in your hands? Why aren't you attending to your customers? or are they all here with you?"

A warm murmur of "Gold!" ran through the crowd, who stared with greedy eyes as the bank messenger, porter, and clerks hurried out to carry in upon their shoulders the heavy canvas bags, all tied carefully about the throat and sealed with a formidable, dangling red seal. There were a dozen of these bags; the crowd counted them, and murmured among themselves the number.

"Every one o' them bags weighs pretty nigh a half-hundredweight," said a man, who had surreptitiously helped to lift one out of the dogcart; "I tried 'em. And there's a round dozen on 'em. I reckon there's a good many hundred thousand golden sovereigns, take 'em all together. I think I'll let my little lot be, and gan home."

A fatuous smile of uncertainty flickered over the faces of many of the crowd as they watched the man depart with his anxiety assuaged; but no one followed his example; there were too many resolved

doubters stationed with glum faces next the door. The hour began to strike on the market clock,—Sir William's gift to the town,—and still the door remained closed. The resolute ones began to grumble and shake their heads, and even to bestow kicks on the door. The last stroke of nine had just died away when the bolts of the bank door were shot back, and one half of it was opened. The crowd pushed as at the pit-door of a theatre.

"Easy, gentlemen," said the porter; "one at a time, please. And don't kick the door; it was new painted only a week or two ago."

In the meantime Miss Philippa had addressed a hurried word or two to Philip. "Look after those bags yourself. I've driven the load over from the bank at West Dormus. Listen! The bag with the two seals is the only one that contains gold, and it has only five hundred pounds; it was all they could rake together to give me. The gold is in a smaller bag in the mouth of the other; mind that. Take care and make a display by pouring it out before the eyes of the idiots. The rest of the bag is silver, and all the other bags are either silver or copper, but the fools, of course, will think them gold. Now go, and keep cool; and if you let me have my way, scarcely a penny will be drawn out, I'll wager you. I'll go in and speak to them—outside the counter, of course. May I?"

"Certainly, cousin," said Philip, with something like enthusiasm. "I have entire confidence in you."

When the crowd pushed in, they saw behind the counter the clerks sitting quietly at their desks, Mr. Philip and the cashiers scanning the seals of the dozen canvas bags brought by Miss Philippa, and Miss Philippa herself standing before them, her hands stuck manfully in the pockets of her jacket. The first comers pushed up to the counter, and Philip cast a careless eye upon them, and in leisurely fashion

cut the string about the throat of one of the canvas bags, brought it forward, and slowly poured its contents out into a drawer. How cheering and invigorating was the musical rush of the stream of gold! The chief cashier had just taken the first cheque into his hand when Miss Philippa flapped out her handkerchief and blew a blast upon her nose like that of the trump of doom.

"One moment, cashier," said Miss Philippa.

"Eh?" said the cashier; he glanced at Philip, and turned eye and ear towards Philippa and waited.

"I want to have a word with these gentlemen," said she. "You are all customers of Pierrepont's Bank?" There was a broken, rustling murmur of "Yes." "Well, so am I." Philip gave her a quick glance, which she caught and held, while she said, "All my money will be in the bank from to-day, and so I think I'm worth listening to."

"Ay, ay, Miss Philippa," was murmured.

"But you're a Perpont yourself, Miss Philippa," said a louder voice, "and kin stands by kind."

"So kin should," said Philippa. "But it's more than Jonathan Allport does," she added, singling out the speaker. "Who was kind to Jonathan Allport five-and-twenty years ago, and gave him a new start as a miller, when his mill was going to be sold over his head? Who but Pierrepont's, when it was in the hands of my father and uncle? But if kin stands by kind, do you think I would do it to the tune of sixty thousand, if I thought Pierrepont's was going to break?"

"That'll be the size of her fartune, belike," was murmured.

"Now, just listen to me," said Philippa, in a clear, firm voice. "What do you use a bank for? You put your money into a bank to have it kept safe and to get a percentage; do you think a percentage is grown by spreading the money, like mushroom spawn,

on the cellar floors? No, you're not such idiots. You know that a bank goes on by putting its money out here and there at interest; and you know well enough that any bank could be ruined any day if all its customers rushed together to draw their money out. All the customers of the bank are not here, but there are a good many. There happens to be plenty of money, because I've brought it after a good deal of trouble. But let me tell you it's a discreditable, silly thing you're doing—for no better reason than a flock of sheep have when they all follow one through a hole in a hedge."

"There en't no business to be a 'ole in the 'edge, Miss Philippa," said an old fellow.

"I'd like to see the hedge, Stephen," said Miss Philippa, "that any fool of a sheep couldn't find a hole in, if he gave his mind to it." At that there was a laugh. "Now," continued Philippa, taking a notebook and pencil from her pocket, "I won't hinder the cashiers any longer. *But*—Pierrepont's will have no more to say to folk that don't trust it; so I'm going to take the name of every man that draws his money out, and if Pierrepont's takes him back again, Pierrepont's will have to do without me. Go on, cashier. Who is that you're paying?"

"Samuel Budden," answered the cashier, with lifted eyebrows, which plainly signified that he considered all that was passing extremely irregular.

"Samuel Budden," repeated Philippa, writing. "Of where?—One Ash Farm."

Samuel looked pale, pinched, and puzzled, as he silently gathered up his money and with palpable reluctance retired to count it. There was no second—all hesitated to assume that desperate position. Those who had handed in their demands to the other cashiers reclaimed them, saying they would think it over; and none of those behind took their places. They looked upon each other: what was to be done?

"Well," said Philippa, with waiting pencil, "why don't you go on? There were none of you backward two minutes ago; and Pierrepont's is just where it was."

There is a general dislike among all sorts and conditions of men to have their names taken down: they do not know what it may lead to; it may produce summonses, prosecutions, and Heaven alone knows what. So everyone looked upon his neighbour in a thick maze, while even the clerks paused at their work and began to grin. It was a trying moment—trying even to Philippa, for she had staked much upon that daring move. At length came kindly relief.

"Ay, but, Miss Philippa," spoke up the old fellow who was supposed to have been snubbed concerning the hole in the hedge, "where was the shepherd that he didn't keep sheape from going through that theer 'ole? I mean to say, Miss Philippa, in a manner o' speaking, and begging your pardon, what for en't Sir William about?"

"Sir William," said Miss Philippa, speaking hurriedly, but keeping a strong control of herself, "has had to go away on affairs which had nothing to do with the bank,—nothing at all. A friend of his is in great trouble, and he may not be back for some time."

"Well now, then, Miss Philippa," said the old man, "axing your pardon again and as often as I need, I will say that thic-un here to-do is rayther hard on Sir William, and him away with a diseased friend, as you may say." The throng was beginning to laugh at Stephen's eloquence; but he went on, "You'll excuse me, Miss Philippa, but did I understand you to say in so many words that you had put all your money into this here bank? You'll excuse me, ma'am, but if it's really true,—yea and verily,—it's the most stiddying thing that can be for everybody."

"You may be assured it's quite true, Stephen," said Miss Philippa.

"Well, all I says is, 'Hooray for Perpont's!' Us don't want to quarrel wi' Perpont's,—do us, boys? Perpont's hev oftens been a good friend to a many on us, besides the miller. I hev known Perpont's my own self a vast number o' years, and I hope I'll know Perpont's a number o' years more. Hip, hip, hooray!"

That was practically the end of the difficulty. Philippa had saved Pierrepont's. It may not have been business, but it was a triumph; even the chief cashier admitted that. The door was opened wide, and those still struggling in on the strain of anxiety met and were swept back by the crowd pushing out in hilarious relief, declaring it was all right, and shouting "Hooray for Perpont's!"

"We'll be receiving notices from some depositors by post," said Philip to his cousin, "but they must wait seven days, and by that time they'll want to withdraw them."

"Quite so," said Miss Philippa. "Now I must go; I want my breakfast. Come and dine with me to-night: I want a talk with you."

Philippa drove away in her dogcart, and was cheered lustily all the way out of the town.

CHAPTER XIV

PHILIP AND PHILIPPA

THE day passed at the bank with Philip quietly and smoothly, with now and then a pleasant zephyr of congratulation that threatened disaster had been so successfully averted. The name of Miss Philippa was in everybody's mouth; she was the heroine of East Dormus for the time; and Philip was proud of her, and of his own astuteness in bringing her to the front, and he went to dine with her in an agreeable condition of expectation.

He had been doubtful, having regard to the singularly plain attire which Philippa usually affected, whether he ought to array himself in evening dress. He did so array himself, and he had his reward. Philippa herself was in magnificent dinner-dress (and Philip had to admit to himself that she looked decidedly handsome), and she complimented him on the propriety of his appearance.

"I am glad you've dressed yourself," she said, "though I forgot to ask you to do it. I always dress for dinner, out of self-respect, though I am a solitary spinster. Men and women owe it to themselves, if to nobody else, to feel that they look their best at least once a day. Dinner is my one meal; and a good dinner and a good book should both be sat down to in full dress."

Over dinner she would talk only of books and politics, and upon both she had firmly-grounded opinions. Philip, who had begun the evening with

self-possession, not to say conceit, began to feel uneasy, for he perceived his cousin had read—and read well—far more than he. He felt she was turning his mind inside out, and he was compelled to find a good reason for every opinion he uttered. The end of dinner, therefore, when Philippa rose and intimated that business was to be talked anon, was the beginning of a season of relief to the young man.

"I don't mind smoking in my drawing-room," said Miss Philippa. "You can come in when you like."

"I'll come at once," said Philip.

"Come at once?" exclaimed Philippa. "Nonsense! Don't pretend you don't want your wine! I don't believe in your new young men that have no redeeming vice. No; stay and take off your claret. It's good; it was bottled by my father."

Philip, therefore, sat down again obediently, and "pree'd" the old claret of Philippa's father. But it will be conceded that a man, unless he be a steady drinker or connoisseur of wines, must weary soon of the silent company of a bottle. Philip was neither much of a drinker nor a connoisseur of the vintages of France: his was rather the modern taste of the ignorant and the neurotic for the frothy, heady decoctions of the native apple or gooseberry, falsely called champagne. So he left his bottle unfinished, and put the cork in; and though he thus may commend himself to the economically minded, he fell in the esteem of his cousin, and even of her fat butler; for the wine-fancier knows that fine wine left from one day to another is worthless; it is only your coarse preparations of Spain and Italy that that proceeding makes little difference to.

"Well, have you finished your wine?" asked Philippa, when he appeared in the drawing-room.

"I have taken all I wanted," answered Philip, with a smile. "Really, cousin, to finish the bottle—!"

"Then you don't like it?" exclaimed Philippa.

"I do, cousin. But where would my head have been for business if I had finished it?"

"Humph! You must have a weak head, cousin; or, is it a cold heart?" and she considered him shrewdly. "My father always said, 'When the cork is drawn, the wine must be drunk;' and he knew what he was talking about. But if you don't know good wine, John does: I have no doubt he will finish it. Well, now, cousin, the cork of this business between us has been drawn, and we had better go through with it. You heard, of course, what I committed myself to this morning?"

"Of course I did," answered Philip. "It was exceedingly generous."

"H'm. Generosity is not quite my intention. But my money came from Pierrepont's, and back it shall go to its source; that is, unless Pierrepont's refuses it."

"Let me say, as representing Pierrepont's, that Pierrepont's will be very thankful to have it."

"You mean that the bank really needs it? It is rather shaky, then?"

"It is not so secure as it ought to be. We have had some bad debts, and Sir William during the last two or three years has invested the bank's money, as well as his own private income, in a good many risky securities,—Colonial Land and Harbour Loans and Foreign Stocks of one sort and another."

"H'm! Sir William has? How long have you been a partner?"

"Five years," answered Philip.

"So, I suppose, you share with Sir William the responsibility for the investments made during that time?"

"Certainly I do."

"Then, cousin," said Philippa somewhat sharply, "if I were you, I should not say 'Sir William,' but 'We' invested. Sir William is not here to defend himself."

Philip permitted himself to wince slightly; he did not relish that direct kind of reproof and instruction in righteousness. But he accepted it with a tolerably good grace. "I am corrected, cousin," said he, with a bow of cordial humility.

"H'm!" said Philippa. "Yes. Well, now," she continued, "Sir William has absolutely, in writing, withdrawn from the management of the bank and left it to you?"

Philip drew Sir William's letter from his pocket. "Here," said he, "are his words;" he presented the letter, but so folded that no more could discreetly be read than he offered for reading.

Philippa read, and was satisfied. She handed the letter back, folded as she had received it. "Then," said she, "in dealing with you I am dealing with the bank?"

"Certainly you are, cousin," answered Philip.

"Very well. Considering the amount of capital I bring to the bank,—something more than sixty thousand,—do you, or do you not, think I can reasonably ask to be a partner?" Philip was able to mask whatever feeling that unexpected proposal provoked in him. Philippa continued, "I don't mean a partner in the sense of attending at the office every day and sharing all the details of the business, but a sort of sleeping partner; earning, not the current official percentage paid to depositors, but a proportionate share of the profits of the bank, and consulted about important investments. Does that arrangement smile upon you?"

"Perfectly," answered Philip, after the merest pause of deliberation, in which he considered that, after all, Philippa was a woman and might be easily managed by a man who had banking at his fingers' end. He was, therefore, somewhat piqued in his self-esteem by what Philippa went on to say.

"You are rather young, you know," said she, fixing

her eye on him, "to have the control of a bank, and you've seen too little of the world. You haven't travelled much, I think."

"Not much; scarcely at all," answered Philip, nettled, but smiling. "But what has banking to do with travel?"

"A great deal," answered Philippa promptly. "A banker is not a shopkeeper. Banking is a fine art, like diplomacy. Good gracious! You have not been thinking that measuring yards of calico and managing dealings in finance are the same? I hope, Philip," said she seriously, "you have not got shop in the blood! Your poor mother was very shoppy!" Philip laughed and said he hoped he had not. But the more he seemed to take her remarks as persiflage, the more serious and caustic she became. "I have set my mind on seeing Pierrepont's a great success," she continued, "and you, therefore, a good banker. There are one or two things in yourself you must observe and correct. You are too provincial. Don't be provincial: it narrows a young man's views, spoils his tastes, and gives him low ideals. These things are bad in a man, and worse in a banker. And you are rather too ready, Philip, to show you think well of yourself. Always think as well of yourself as you please, but don't always show it; that's not good manners. For Heaven's sake, correct these things, or I shall never endure you! There's a good boy."

When Philip left his cousin, he did not feel himself so completely master of the situation as he had anticipated he would be. Philippa clearly meant to be considered; and she was to be a partner! Yet—he twirled his cane gaily as he walked home; for he saw himself, after the passage of some years, sole partner in the bank, heir of Philippa's tens of thousands (he was sure he could ingratiate himself into that position), and residuary inheritor of Sir William's

interest (such as it was) and of Sir William's title,—if no other rightful claimant appeared.

"Sir Philip Pierrepont!" he murmured in his own ear. But in counting on that he showed an ignorance of conditions which argued ill for the success of all his hopes. Sir William's was a new baronetcy, and could only be inherited out of the direct line by an express provision that it might be.

CHAPTER XV

PHILIP BEGINS TO REIGN

PHILIP, according to arrangement with Philippa, drew up a statement of the affairs of the bank for her inspection. They agreed that Sir William's share should be allowed to fructify at the same rate as their own shares,—the stipulated seven pounds a week only being paid out of the fructification,—and then a private deed of partnership was made between them, according to which Philip was to be sole and responsible manager of the ordinary affairs of the bank, and Philippa was to be consulted only concerning grave issues or serious investments.

Thus it came to pass that Philippa knew nothing of a certain strange communication which presently took place between Philip and Coverley,—if, indeed, she was aware of the existence of the latter young man. A month came and went, but, in spite of advertisement and handbill, no one appeared to say that the two blue envelopes were found. That depressed Coverley very much, more on the Squire's account than on his own; for he could get a new copy of his lease, even if he could never know what was written in Sir William's private communication. About the middle of November he resolved to call on Philip Pierrepont at the bank, to ask him for a new copy of the lease of Brockham, and to speak also of another matter that was assuming anxious proportions: for years he had received through Sir William on the first of every month an allowance;

he had for the first time failed to receive that allowance on the first of November, and he found it necessary to inquire concerning it.

When he was in East Dormus on market-day, he called at the bank and saw Philip, who now regularly sat in what had been Sir William's room. Philip received him with his stiffest, hardest manner, and Coverley was proportionately repelled and stiffened and hardened.

"I suppose, Mr. Pierrepont," said Coverley, "you have no news of those lost papers?"

"None whatever," said Philip. "I think they must be given up for lost beyond recall."

"I suppose they must," said Coverley. "Then, in that case, hadn't I better have a new copy of the lease of Brockham?"

"Lease of Brockham?" exclaimed Philip. "Why should you have a lease of Brockham?"

"Because I am the tenant of Brockham, and it is well to have a fact of that kind securely set down in lawyer's black and white."

"One moment," said Philip, rising and standing comfortably with his back to the fire, while Coverley sat beyond the writing-table with his elbows on his knees and looked up sternly and sharply in Philip's face. "You say you are the tenant of Brockham. I knew Evelegh was out, but I didn't know you were in. Did Sir William accept you as a tenant?"

"He did," answered Coverley, angry, suspicious, and alert. He had it on his tongue to say, "And you know that well enough!" but, after all, he thought, Philip might not have heard: the fact was not widely spoken of. He continued, "And it's the lease that he handed me that is lost."

"Are you quite sure of that?" said Philip, in his promptest manner of nailing down a misstatement. He was so prompt, so hard, and so evidently earnest,

that Coverley's belief in what he had not doubted until now was shaken.

"I believe Sir William said it was," he answered.

"If you're right," said Philip, "we should have a copy too. I have not come across such a thing; but I'll have a look, and I'll let you know."

Coverley received that assurance in dull and anxious wonder, gazing the while on Philip with no eye of trust or liking. Yet what could he do but wait till Philip had looked for the bank's copy of the lease?

"There is another thing," he resumed, "that I must mention." He was so suspicious and angry, and he disliked Philip so much, that he had no scruple about speaking plainly out regarding the matter which under ordinary conditions he would have been shy of mentioning. "I have not received my allowance this month: I have always hitherto received it on the first. I suppose it has been forgotten through Sir William's absence."

"Really, Mr. Coverley," said Philip, with a high, harsh laugh, "you seem determined to mystify me! May I ask what allowance you mean? For I know of no allowance."

"The allowance," said Coverley, blushing very red, "which Sir William has always paid me, on behalf of my people, I suppose."

"What, may I ask, is the name of your people? I may be able to trace it if I can refer to their account."

Coverley rose, grasping his riding-whip: with the strongest gusto he could have raised it and struck. Rage and resentment glowed in his face: in the other's, feeling was only expressed in the hard, glittering eye, hateful as a snake's.

"I don't know," said Coverley, and if he could have made it so, every word would have been a cut.

Philip raised an eyebrow in the merest polite

surprise. "If you don't know their name, I—I am very sorry—but I don't see what can be done in the matter, till we can consult Sir William."

"Oh! Good afternoon."

Coverley could not trust himself to linger to say another word. He marched out, bursting with rage and mortification. What was the meaning of the doubt about the lease? What the meaning of the refusal to recognise the allowance? And, especially, what was the meaning of Philip's veiled insolence of look and tone? What was the meaning of it all? Had Sir William neglected or betrayed his interests? Remembering his last scene with the banker, in connection with a long tale of attention and kindness, he could not believe *that*. Yet what could he do? What mortified him most was the young banker's insolent flout at his unknown origin,—a flout which he could but resent and rage against in silence. For he was ignorant of his parents, ignorant of his relations, ignorant even of his right to the name he bore.

His anger and mortification were thus driven in, to become more dangerous to his peace. The only relief he could obtain was in a furious gallop back to his solitude at Holly Bush Farm. He could not even seek consolation and calm in the company of his sweetheart, though she risked her father's displeasure in meeting him now and then (and always on market-days) at her sister's house. Evelegh had forbidden his daughter to have aught more to say or do with Coverley; but in her silent woman's way she could be as obstinate as he, and she continued to see and speak to her lover as often as she could. Parents may not approve of such conduct, but I hope to be forgiven for applauding it as proper and inevitable. The true heart can no more be dictated to unreasonably than the true conscience; and it might be well both for clergymen and parents to consider that when their prohibitions, based merely on authority,

and not on reason and love, are answered by silence, such silence does not mean submission and obedience.

Jenny waited all that afternoon for her lover in vain; and when he did not come, she went home sad and sore at heart, but with no pricking of conscience for having disobeyed her father.

On Monday morning a bombshell burst at Holly Bush Farm. To drop metaphor, there came a letter from Philip Pierrepont which scattered for the time all Coverley's hopes and preconceptions.

This is what Coverley read—

"DEAR SIR,—I have looked carefully through the records of the bank and the available papers of Sir William, and I can find no trace or evidence of your having been accepted as tenant of Brockham. Under the circumstances, and anticipating your desire to renew overtures for the tenancy, I beg to inform you that the bank declines to entertain your offer, as it has already arranged that another tenant shall enter upon occupation of the farm. You will therefore oblige the bank by removing from Brockham farm and dwelling-house such marks of tenancy as you have already put there under a mistake, and by desisting from trespassing thereon and therein.—Yours faithfully,

"PHILIP PIERREPONT."

"This," said Coverley, beside himself, and scarce finding words to relieve his anger and bewilderment —to express them was impossible—"this is sheer insolence! What does he mean by writing to me like this?"

He folded and refolded the letter, as he tramped up and down his parlour, and then he opened it out again to re-read it. Still he tramped up and down, demanding of himself the meaning of this, though the literal meaning was plain enough. The imperious

necessity of finding relief in speech with another made itself felt. He swallowed a mouthful of breakfast, changed his dress, and marched off to talk with the Squire.

The Squire and he had become pretty close friends since their expedition to London together,—between such as they a secret breeds confidence,—and they saw more of each other than they had been wont. The Squire frequently walked over in the morning to see how Coverley was getting on with his autumn ploughing, and to wonder with him what Sir William was doing, and Coverley often looked in at the Hall in the evening. After he had set out, he bethought him that if he went direct to the Hall he would interrupt the Squire at breakfast; so he turned aside to see the ploughing on his farm. From the upland field where his ploughman was at work he looked down upon Brockham, and saw two more of his men breaking up with the plough an unproductive, ragged, hanging slope of pasture called the Warren. He went down to them and astonished them by bidding them desist and take their horses home. While they slowly unharnessed and "*by-ow'd*" and "*gee-hup'd*," he looked about him. On that wide, barren, profitless pasture (and on a similar part of the Holly Bush Farm) he had meant to make a great experiment. The soil was almost as light and sandy as the sea-shore, and it had been overrun and riddled by rabbits. He had exterminated the rabbits, and he was preparing for the implantation of hyacinth, tulip, and narcissus bulbs, of which he had got a large supply from Holland. Now his experiment must cease, he supposed, except in the restricted form in which he had prepared to try it on the Holly Bush Farm; and his resentment against Philip boiled up afresh.

He turned away and marched to see the Squire in the mood to fight Philip and the bank for his tenancy

of Brockham. When he reached the Hall, he was told that the Squire had gone to the Home Farm. Thither he followed him, and found him at the empty house with one or two workmen.

"Well, Coverley," said the Squire, "I've just got rid of that rascal and thief Timpenny, and I'm going to get the house ready for our old friend and enemy Evelegh."

"That's an odd coincidence, Squire," said the young man; "for I've come to have a word with you about something that concerns Evelegh in a sort of way;—at least, it's about Brockham."

"Oh!" said the Squire, laying down the workman's hammer with which he had been about to drive a nail: he would always insist on thus aiding men in their occupations. "What about Brockham?"

"Read that," said Coverley, handing Philip's letter.

"But," exclaimed the Squire when he had read, "what does it mean?—'Desist from trespassing thereon and therein,'" said he, looking again at the letter. "'Pon my word, Master Philip is becoming d—d legal! But what does he mean?—'Looked carefully through the records' . . . 'can find no trace' . . . 'declines to entertain your offer.' Eh?"

"For some reason," said Coverley, "he wishes to edge me out of Brockham. I went to him on Friday to ask for a copy of the lease in place of the one that has been lost; he had never heard of a lease, and doubted whether Sir William had ever accepted me as tenant."

"Doubted whether—?" exclaimed the Squire. "Why, he was present when Sir William and I were talking about that very thing, and he joined in the talk, too!"

"He did?" exclaimed Coverley. "Then he is lying! He is committing a conscious breach of faith, and I'll expose him!" he said, with heat.

"Gently, Coverley," said the Squire, whose thermometer went down as his companion's went up.

"I beg your pardon, Squire," said Coverley. "I forget he is your relation."

"Oh, no matter for that," said the Squire: "that's not what I mean,—but this. Let us think why Philip wishes to get out of the ratification—I think that's the word—of Sir William's choice of you as tenant. He knows you are fond of experiments, of course, but can he doubt in spite of that your ability to pay your rent? No!—Eh?" said the Squire suddenly, for a frown passed upon Coverley's face, to give place to a complete change of expression: resentment and resolution had become shame and hesitation.

"Wait a minute, Squire," said he. After a pause he continued, "There is something else I must tell you. For years I have received through Sir William a monthly allowance. On the first of November I failed for the first time to get it, and I set the matter before Mr. Philip. He said he knew nothing of it, and that nothing could be done till Sir William's return. I thought he was very insolent about it, but that may have been because of my sensitiveness: I will admit that much: I won't accuse him again."

"Philip seems to be behaving very unhandsomely!" said the Squire. "Will you let me judge of his insolence? What did he say?"

After a further struggle with himself, Coverley said reluctantly—

"It's an odd thing that I have never known from whom my allowance came; and Mr. Philip seemed to imply that, since I could not tell him the name of that person, I was without origin, without parents"—

"In short," said the Squire, with a smile, "a kind of Melchizedek."

But Coverley was still serious. "I may have been mistaken," said he; "but I took it so. It was always

a difficulty between Sir William and me," he added bitterly, "that he would never tell me anything about my people,—except that I was a gentleman born in lawful wedlock, and it is one of the hard things in the loss of those papers that among them was a communication concerning my parentage:—that was the last thing Sir William told me."

"Sir William told you that?—last thing?—before he went away?" The Squire considered Coverley closely: he could see as far through a brick wall as any man, if there was a chink or a hole in it. But whatever he saw then—or thought he saw—he kept to himself. He said, "So, if your allowance is cut off, you *might* find it difficult to pay the rent?"

"I might," said Coverley; "I didn't think of that."

"And so," continued the Squire, "it might be as well to let Philip take back Brockham, and say no more about it: it may be a good riddance for you."

Coverley evidently did not welcome that view. "Perhaps it may," said he. "Brockham," he continued, "has brought me only trouble and ill-luck since I meddled with it. I have failed in my chief purpose, and perhaps I had better let it go without fighting over it: Evelegh will have nothing to do with my arrangement for his benefit, and has become my furious enemy,—and now, it seems, it has made an enemy of Mr. Philip."

"I don't think that has made Philip your enemy," said the Squire.

"What has, then?" demanded Coverley.

"I am not prepared to agree that Philip *is* your enemy; but if he is, I can't think the affair of Brockham has made him. No, no."

"It's very bitter to give the place up without a struggle," continued the young man. "But look here, Squire, I shall take it more cheerfully, if you will do something. You know I was getting ready

to make a big experiment with the Warren: you have an exactly similar bit of land down there,—that ragged stretch of pasture: it can't be worth much as it is."

"Well?" said the Squire, with a smile, for he was beginning to perceive his drift.

"It's beautifully placed," went on Coverley, with kindling enthusiasm. "It lies to the south-west, and it is sheltered by that holly plantation on the top: it's a lovely bit for the purpose!"

"Well?"

"You are going to work the Home Farm yourself"—

"With Evelegh."

"With Evelegh, of course, who will obey you."

"I'm not so sure of that. But go on."

"Will you try my experiment there?" asked Coverley, blushing: he was truly a young man. "I'll give you the bulbs; it will cost you only the breaking up and the manure—plenty of manure. Will you try it?"

The Squire smiled and laid his hand on the young man's shoulder. "Well,—yes, I will." He laughed. "It will be great fun to hear what Evelegh will say when he sees me taking up with your notions."

"Evelegh," said Coverley sadly, "will submit to your arrangements: you're not a new man."

"Very well, then," said the Squire; "on that condition you'll let Philip and Brockham slide? That's settled?"

"That's settled, Squire."

CHAPTER XVI

AN INVITATION TO TEA

THOUGH the fates are unceasingly working out the issues of our lives, we are for the most part unaware of their action. Except at some crisis, when we lift our heads and take a wide view, we are, like the man with the muck-rake in the delectable story of Bunyan's Pilgrim, intent upon the dust and moil, the small incidents, sensations, and sentiments, of the day and the hour.

When Coverley had made up his mind to let the tenancy of Brockham slide, he let it slide, and went on his casual daily way,—waking and sleeping, and aiding in the threshing of his corn (it had just come to his turn to have the travelling steam-thresher on the farm), with an occasional pang of regret that Brockham was gone, but more frequently a slight itch of curiosity to know what Philip Pierrepont thought of his unquestioning acceptance of his notice. But he never guessed or wondered what other trials might be preparing for him. He had been troubled what to do with all the Evelegh "belongings" which he had bought, and which were still at Brockham; but he had taken counsel with the Squire, and had arranged that the things should be transferred to the Home Farm, and that, when Evelegh should find himself there in the midst of familiar chairs and tables, and with familiar pictures looking down on him, the Squire should accept the credit of the transfer. It was only after generous protestations and tears

that Jenny Evelegh consented to bear out the deception.

"It is a shame!" she cried; "and when I think of it, it burns in me!—that my father should be so unjust and hateful to you! and that I must pretend that somebody else has done for us what you have done,—you that have been our best friend! I sometimes feel I can't look you in the face again!"

Thus two or three weeks passed away, and Christmas was within easy hail, when there came a diversion of incident not without ultimate consequence to one or two of the people in whom we are interested. A nipping and an eager frost had descended and bound everything hard; and then had fallen five or six inches of snow. At the end of a week the frost held tighter than ever, and the snow still lay, trodden hard on the roads, but soft and white as swans' down on the fields and hedgerows. Every puddle was changed into a block of ice, and the river (which was not swift) was covered with an ice-sheet three or four inches thick. Then all those who had nimble feet and warm blood began to think of skates, and among them were the Squire's daughters and Coverley, the latter of whom the frost had deprived of farm occupation. They skated on a pond, or lake, in the Squire's grounds; but, being all three good and fearless skaters, they desired greater space for their ambitious performance of "outside edge" and other ornamentations of the pastime. Now close to East Dormus the river spread into a wide and shallow stretch, which was admirable for the satisfaction of their desire,—only the Squire objected to his daughters going there, because it was overrun (he believed) by all the skating youth of the town, male and female.

"I wish," said Adela one day, in a heated pause in their amusement, "that we could go and practise on the river. We go round and round here, like children for ever saying, 'a, b—ab.' And I should like to see

other people skating. This is like being in a school of three: you can't tell whether you are clever or a dunce without comparison."

"Perhaps," said Coverley, "the Squire would let you go if I went to look after you."

"Oh, I'm sure he would!" exclaimed Adela.

"Do ask him!" said her sister.

"He thinks you such a"— Adela broke off with a blush.

"A what?" asked Coverley.

"Well,—a sensible and serious man," she answered, with the look of challenge which so well became her.

"What?" he laughed. "I'm 'old and serious, brown and big,' I suppose." He laughed, but he was nettled: the Squire, he thought, need not have spoken of him with so much solemnity.

"I know where that's from," said Adela; "it's from Mr. Stevenson's *Child's Garden of Verses*. If you like that, you can't be so very old and serious. But ask father—will you?—if we can go. Let us have another round."

He walked home with the girls, and made the proposal to the Squire. The Squire assented, and next day, after an early lunch (the expedition was made so late in order that they might stay till after dark and see the skating by torchlight) Coverley came, wrapped in a handsome fur-coat, in a sledge which he had made by taking a dogcart off its wheels and affixing it to runners. Since yesterday Dorothy had developed a cold and was in bed, so the sledge was only occupied by Adela and himself. They swept swiftly through the keen and stimulating air, which tingled and thrilled in their blood, and gave a brisk cheerfulness to the prospect arrayed in monotonous white, sparkling as with infinite jewel-work in the low December sun. They put the sledge up at the Pierrepont Arms, and then they went skating.

Even the most bilious person would have admitted

they were a goodly couple,—he well-knit, muscular, and lithe, and she with her noble carriage of health and beauty, distractingly arrayed in white fur jacket and toque, between which her hair shone out with the red brown of autumn.

Near and far, in the crowd and out of the crowd,—the observed and envied of many young people,—they skated with vast enjoyment till the going down of the sun and the rising of the frost-haze. It was yet by no means dark, however, and as they rushed along, Adela caught sight of an odd figure swinging by; the upper part seemed man,—in pilot-jacket, streaming muffler, and bowler hat,—while the nether part certainly was woman.

"Gracious!" said Adela; "it's Cousin Philippa. I must speak to her, for she's sure to have seen me: she sees everybody."

Adela skated towards Cousin Philippa, followed by Coverley a little way off.

"Oh," said Philippa, when they met, "I thought it was you, my dear. It's a long time since you've been to see me. Don't excuse yourself; I know your father doesn't think my company the best for girls. Who's your conductor? He's a handsome fellow—I do like to see a well-set-up man—strong and brown."

"'Old and serious, big and brown,'" said Adela.

"Eh? What's that?"

"His name is Coverley. He is a gentleman whose pleasure it is to practise farming in our neighbourhood, cousin."

"Coverley? Coverley? Surely I know the name," said Philippa.

"It's the name of a dance, cousin,—and of a knight, 'old and serious,' that you must have read about in one of your old books."

"H'm!" said Philippa. "You remind me of myself, child, when I was your age; I hope you don't mind my saying that."

"Not at all, cousin," said Adela cordially. "I only hope I shall be as good-natured as you are when I am middle-aged."

"It's nice of you to say that. Now you must come and take a cup of tea with me,—you and the big brown man. You mustn't say 'No.'"

Coverley was introduced, and they retired to the bank to take off their skates. It was but a little way from the river to Philippa's house. When they entered the dusk of the drawing-room, there rose in the firelight two figures—those of a man and a woman.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Philippa. "Who's this?"

"It's me, cousin," said the man's voice,—Philip's,—"and Miss Swinton. Do you forget that you asked us to come in to tea?"

"Did I? How stupid of me!" said Philippa. "But haven't you been on the river? Haven't you been skating?"

"Not much," answered Philip.

"I don't skate, Miss Philippa," said Miss Swinton.

"How wearisome for you just now," said Adela, with sham sympathy, "when everybody skates. But I suppose you had no chance of learning at Birmingham." Trust one young lady to find a polished means of stabbing another.

Miss Swinton said nothing. Lights and tea were brought in, and Miss Swinton stood revealed as a rather pretty, delicate-looking girl, with black hair and black eyes,—bright and large, but expressionless. Her prettiness and delicacy were in startling contrast with the magnificent health and beauty of Adela's person; and doubtless the Birmingham girl felt it, for she continued with tight lips and hard eyes to survey Adela while she talked.

"Oh," said Philippa, "Mr. Coverley, do you know my cousin Philip?"

"Mr. Coverley and I know each other," said Philip.

They acknowledged each other's presence by the slight duck of the head which Englishmen call a "bow."

They drank their tea and talked with considerable constraint, all but Miss Philippa, who never lost her presence of mind, and Adela, who rattled on in a half merry and wholly vicious strain, which did not add to the comfort of Miss Swinton and Philip. Soon Miss Swinton rose and said she must go, and Philip rose with her.

"Does she often come here, cousin?" asked Adela, when they were gone.

"Pretty frequently," answered Philippa, considering her narrowly.

"And he comes to meet her, I suppose,—forsaking even his business at the bank!"

"If I understand it," said Philippa, "*she* is part of his bank business. Mr. Coverley," continued Philippa, "like a good-natured man,—as I am sure you are,—amuse yourself by looking at my pictures or those books, while I have a private word with this young lady."

"Certainly, Miss Pierrepont," said Coverley, with a laugh, and removed himself from their neighbourhood,—though presently Miss Philippa's voice rose so that he could not choose but hear.

"Philip," said Miss Philippa, "wants to marry her, and I am obliging enough to try to remove certain little obstacles in the way." Adela turned pale, but contained herself and said nothing. Philippa laid her hand on the girl's. "Don't think me a silly, spiteful woman for telling you that. I have told you for a purpose, my dear. I have seen how things were with you. Don't be offended with me, child. I like you, and I don't like Philip. He is clever, and he amuses me,—but I don't like him. Then why trouble to help him, you wonder? Because I want to tie him down and keep him as much as I can from

doing mischief. He is one of the cold, selfish, ambitious men that are born to make the world an uncomfortable and bitter place to live in. Believe me, Philip can't love anybody but himself. Do you fancy he loves that girl? Not he! He loves her bag of money. And can you think she loves him? Look at her eye: it's bright, but it's as hard as a cock's! There's no foolish sentiment about Miss Swinton; she only wants to make what she reckons a good marriage. So I say, 'By all means! Tie them up together, and keep them from making mischief with other people! They're both of a sort, and when she's married you may be sure she'll keep Philip well in hand! No, no, my dear, you are worthy of a far better man than Philip. I couldn't bear to think of your wasting your warm heart on an iceberg. Do you think I'm blaming you, my child? No, I know only too well that we can't help these feelings. Absurd Nature puts them into us for her own absurd purposes, and she doesn't care whether we fix them on an iceberg or a man! You're not offended with me, my dear?"

"No, cousin," said Adela, "I'm not offended. I'm sure you mean it kindly. But—if you'll excuse me—I think I had better go home."

"Go home by all means," said Philippa. "But beware of that handsome Mr. Coverley."

The warning fell on unheeding ears. But even if Adela had heeded, she would probably not have believed; for women, and especially girls, are given to think that a man "engaged" is as harmless company as a man married.

Coverley was set thinking by what he had overheard of Miss Philippa's talk. Was Adela in love with her cousin Philip?—and had Philip forsaken her for that other girl? If that were so, he could not admire Philip's taste in women. He considered Adela more closely and tenderly than hitherto. He

pitied her; and when he helped her into the sledge, and perceived she shivered a little, he insisted on wrapping her in an extra rug. On the way home he beguiled the time by such talk as did not demand answers, so that she might, or might not, listen, just as she would.

"I think, Mr. Coverley, if you please," said Adela, when they neared the Hall, "we won't tell father we've been to Cousin Philippa's; he doesn't quite approve of her."

And it did not occur to her that a secret in common was a dangerous bond

CHAPTER XVII

NOTICE TO QUIT!

"SIR,—I hereby give you notice to quit, and deliver up to me, or to whom I may appoint, quiet and peaceable possession of all the messuage, farm lands, and premises known as Holly Bush Farm, and situate in the parish of East Dormus, which you now hold or occupy as tenant, on the twenty-fifth day of December 189—, or on or at such other day or time next after the expiration of six months from the time of your being served with this notice, as the current year of your tenancy shall expire: And in default of your compliance therewith, I do and will insist on your paying me for the same the annual rent of seven hundred and eighty pounds (£780) for such time as you shall keep possession of the said messuage, farm lands, and premises after the expiration of the said notice.—Dated this eighteenth day of December 189—. For Pierrepont's Bank,

"PHILIP PIERREPONT."

On the 19th of December Coverley received that formal notice to quit his farm. His heart had leaped when he saw the long blue envelope, for he fancied for a moment that it might be his lost packet somehow restored. When he read, he was not angry, as he had been when he had received Philip's letter concerning Brockham: he was stunned and amazed. Why was Philip Pierrepont persecuting him in that way? Why did Philip dislike him? He was conscious that he disliked Philip, for no great reason, except "on

instinct," as Sir John Falstaff held his hand off the disguised prince; but in his egoism he did not admit to himself that Philip might dislike him on the same sufficient ground.

"I can see!" he said to himself. "He wants to drive me away from this altogether! Why?"

This notice, though it wrought upon his temper less than the other, smote him more in his purposes and hopes: the more he thought of it, the more he felt it striking at the roots of his life. Against such a notice as that there was no appeal; within six months he must disappear from that land which he had learned to love, and where (young as he was) he had expected to end his days. He must go forth, moneyless and prospectless, to find for himself another place of settlement; and he knew enough of the world to be aware that that was no easy matter. It was the first "real facer" (to use his own expressive phrase) which he had yet encountered in his life, and he sat down to consider it. At school and college he had been comfortably provided for through Sir William, without inquiring seriously whence his comfortable provision came. He had done comfortably well as a student; and with a healthy, comfortable sense of doing the proper thing, when he left college without his mind "made up," and expressly addressed for an ambitious career, he took rooms in London and read for the Bar, as do so many young "Varsity" Englishmen, without a compelling necessity or purpose. At the end of that period, for no better reason than "instinct" or whim, he chose a country life; and he had no one to say him nay, or to argue with him about his choice, for Sir William let him do as he would. After two years as a farm pupil in the eastern counties, he had come to Holly Bush as Sir William's (or the bank's) tenant; and there he had hoped he was planted for life. He was of a healthy, easy, contented mind; he had fallen in love; and he

had seen his days stretch before him simple and bright all through,—laborious, wholesome, and bovine.

Now his life (as he had conceived it) lay shattered before him. Now he began to perceive that what he had seriously regarded as the important business of his days and nights had been but his amusement, for he had not lived by it: he had really lived on that allowance which had been so easily and so mysteriously bestowed, and which had been so easily and so suddenly withdrawn. Why had he received it, and why did he not receive it? He could not tell; but he saw very plainly—for he was no timid, blind fool to obscure his own vision with false issues and false hopes: he could look at a thing steadily enough once it rose into his field of view—he plainly saw that life was only just about to begin for him.

He went out; but the work of the farm had little interest for him. He could but think on the "facer" he had received, and on the necessity of finding speedily either some other farm or some other occupation. At length he found he could keep the matter to himself no longer; so he dressed himself, and went to talk it over with his one confidant and adviser in these latter days,—Squire Pierrepont.

He came upon the Squire where he had found him on a similar occasion,—at the Home Farm, superintending repairs; for the frost had yielded, and the house was not quite ready for Evelegh's occupation.

"What, Coverley?" called the Squire when he saw him. "More letters,—more news? Bad or good?"

"Bad, Squire," answered Coverley.

"Oh!" said the Squire, looking anxiously at him when he heard his tone; "then I'll take a holiday. Let us walk back to the house." He gave a direction or two to the workmen in a business-like fashion worthy of their master, found his stick, whistled to his dog, and departed. "Well?" said he, when he and Coverley were set out together.

"Another notice from Mr. Philip," said Coverley, and handed the letter.

"This," said the Squire, looking very worried when he had read,—"this seems a serious business, Coverley. I suppose the notice is all right?"

"Yes," answered Coverley. "Six months."

"And the seven hundred and eighty pounds?"

"Double rent if I stick to the place. Mr. Philip is quite in order."

"I must say I don't see to the bottom of this business," mused the Squire.

"It is plain to me," said Coverley, "that for some reason Mr. Philip wants me out of his neighbourhood."

"Wants to drive you out of the country, I daresay. But why? I wish I could have a sight of that letter my brother wrote him."

"Why," said Coverley, "you don't think Sir William set him on to do these things?"

"No, no, my lad," answered the Squire. "I can't quite tell you what I think, except that I strongly suspect my nephew of playing a rascally game. I believe," said he, with dark energy, "there's more in this than meets the eye. Look here, Coverley, have you any objection to my sounding Philip? I should like to hear what reasons he can give for sending you this notice."

"If you like to do so, Squire," said Coverley, "I have no objection to make. I myself will have nothing to say with Philip about it."

"But what are you going to do, my lad?"

"I would take myself off," said Coverley desperately, "prevail on Jenny to marry me, and go ranching in Texas; but I have no money to do that with."

The Squire shook his head. "I think that would be a mad move, even if you had the money; and Jenny wouldn't leave her father at present, would she?"

"She says she wouldn't," answered the young man, strong in his powers of persuasion.

"No, no, my lad," insisted the Squire, "don't do that. If I'm not mistaken, that's just what Philip would like you to do."

"Why? Why, Squire?"

"Don't cross-question me, Coverley. I don't see my way to answer you. But take my advice, and stay at home. There's plenty of time yet to think of what you can do; and I'll go to Philip at once, and hear what he has to say for himself. Come over in the afternoon, and I'll tell you."

Coverley returned to Holly Bush. Before lunch the Squire was in the bank, inquiring for his nephew.

"I think, sir," said the clerk, "Mr. Philip will soon be disengaged. He has someone with him at present."

"I'll just step in and wait," said the Squire, and strode into the anteroom of the bank parlour. He had barely entered when the handle of the inner door was turned, and the door was opened an inch or two, and held by someone coming out.

"If I'm not mistaken," he overheard Philip say, "Mr. Coverley will soon enough be far away from this."

Then out came a young farmer-looking man whom the Squire did not know, and went his way.

"Ah!" was Philip's greeting from the inner room, when he caught sight of the Squire; "that you, uncle? Come in."

"I'm coming in," said the Squire, somewhat testily, so that Philip looked sharply up again. "May I ask who that young man is who has just gone out?"

"That? Oh, that's young Bompas."

"And has he some grudge against Coverley too?" Philip looked a question. "I heard you," said the Squire, "assure him that Coverley would soon

be far away, as if that should be good news for him."

"Well," said Philip, "young Bompas is going into Brockham, and he will naturally not be sorry if he loses a neighbour with such very modern and disturbing views of farming as Coverley has. Coverley, I believe, was a thorn in Evelegh's side, before he had to give up Brockham."

"And so you think Coverley will soon be far away?" said the Squire. "Don't be too sure of that." Philip again looked keen and steely. The Squire continued, "Oh, I know you've given him notice to quit Holly Bush. As your uncle, Philip, which I am, and your friend, which I may be, I should very much like to know why you've given him notice."

"I'm not bound to give a reason, uncle," said Philip; "but, since you are so impartially interested in my doings, I don't mind telling you that I'm afraid he'll ruin himself and the farm by his absurd experiments, which I have no covenant to restrain him in. Bompas tells me he has broken up a piece of pasture at Brockham; I might very well claim damages against him for that."

"Philip," said the Squire, shaking his stick at him, "you are telling me a lie! Do you take me for an old fool, that has no memory, and that will swallow any tale you choose to tell? Haven't I heard you praise Coverley for his modern views of farming and for his experiments?"

"That was in my irresponsible days, uncle," said Philip, looking his hardest, and letting his voice ring its most metallic note.

"I don't believe," said the Squire obstinately, "that that is your reason at all for turning him out. You have another reason, I believe,—better and worse than that."

"I don't think I know it," said Philip. "May I beg you to enlighten me, uncle?"

"Philip," said the Squire, less angrily, but as firmly and seriously, "I believe you are trying to play a mean, ugly game, and if it were not that I hope to see your uncle sitting there again by and by, I would withdraw my account, and have nothing more to say or do with you."

"The bank wouldn't suffer much, uncle," said Philip, taking up a pen, as if he were ready there and then to give the Squire his release. "Your account is not a very profitable one."

"You're an insolent jackanapes!" exclaimed the Squire. "But you won't provoke me to withdraw it! And, by the lord Harry! I'll take every means to find your uncle, and let him know what you're about!" And he flung out, and slammed the door.

He did not stay in the town for lunch, but rode hard home. The family lunch was finished, so he ordered food to be brought to him in his study.

"And," said he, "tell Miss Adela I want her."

"Yes, father?" said she, presently sweeping in upon him.

"Just sit down there," said he, "and cut me a piece of bread, and pour me out a glass of claret. No, I'll have a little whisky,—the claret would turn sour; for I'm in a condition of thunder, Adela."

"Oh dear me! what about, father?"

"Look here, my girl—I can't work round and round—I must come straight to the point. What do you think of Philip, my dear?"

Adela turned pale, and then blushed scarlet. "I don't think of him at all, father," said she.

"I'm very glad to hear it. But you used to think a good deal of him, didn't you? Eh, my dear? Don't be alarmed at my question, my girl, I'm not offended; I only want to know."

"I did, father," said she, turning her head away; "but it's all over now."

"What?" exclaimed her father. "Has he jilted you?"

"Jilted me?" exclaimed his daughter, with raised front and flashing eye. "I'd like to see Philip, or any man, do that!" Her father stared. "No, no, father," said she, clasping her hands to him; "I don't mean that! I shouldn't have said that! It was very rude and loud and vulgar!"

"I'm afraid, Adey," said her father, with a light laugh, "whatever man gets you will catch a tartar!"

"Do you think so, father?" said she, quite submissive and tearful. "Oh, I hope not! I think I could do anything for a man I really loved! I could work for him in the fields if he needed me to do it! I could leave all my people, and go and live with him in a labourer's cottage on the other side of the world! What am I saying?" And she quickly hid her face on her father's shoulder.

Her father stroked her head and said, "I fear, my child, you are rather sore about Philip."

"I would let nobody else but you say that, father," said she. "But let us say no more about it: Philip is going to marry Miss Swinton."

"He is? Then God help him! I've done with him for ever! But how do you know that?"

"I heard it," said Adela, "on the very best authority."

"And who was that?"

"Really, father," said his daughter, with an appealing look, "I'm very nearly of age. May I not even have so much property of my own yet as that little secret?"

"That," said the Squire, "is just how your mother used to get round me. You are very like your mother."

"And Cousin Philippa said I am very much like what she was. I suppose the two together must mean I am very much of a woman."

"So it was Cousin Philippa told you!" exclaimed the Squire.

"Was it?" said his daughter. "But why did you want to say that to me about Philip?"

"Because Philip is behaving very meanly and badly." And the Squire told her of his treatment of Coverley.

"Poor Mr. Coverley!" she exclaimed. "But what can he have done to set Philip against him?"

"That's a question easier put than answered, my girl," said the Squire. "But now I should like you girls to be as kind as you can be to Coverley when he comes here, for, poor fellow, he has never had a home. I don't mean that he's a miserable orphan and that sort of thing, or that he has whined to me. He's not that sort of fellow. But he has told me he has never known his parents,—does not even know who they are,—and has no relations that he knows of. So he has never had a home; and I'm bound to say that that's a good deal to have missed."

"Poor fellow! And perhaps he is an earl, or duke, or prince in disguise!" She uttered the sentence in a *crescendo*; but her father brought her flight to the ground.

"Stuff and nonsense!" said he. "But you and Dorothy be kind to him; and, remember, what I've told you about him is a secret."

An hour or two later Coverley appeared, and was surrounded with agreeable attentions in the drawing-room. He had not been unkindly or distantly treated before; but now he felt as if he were taken to the bosom of the family, and his heart was softened and subdued. It was true: he had had hitherto no conception of the sweet delights and confidences,

the cheerfulness and gamesomeness, of a well-regulated home, and now all these sweet seductions began to soak into his mind and heart, gradually transforming his thoughts, his moods, and his affections.

CHAPTER XVIII

CHANGE AND CHANCE

BY the tea-table (at which Miss Pierrepont presided with great dignity) the Squire, cup in hand, related his interview with Philip, or, at least, as much of it as he deemed necessary for business purposes, and all the family exclaimed with amazement at Philip's "under-bred" behaviour.

"There's no kind of satisfaction to be got out of Philip," said the Squire; "and we won't get to the bottom of this business till we see Sir William again."

"Isn't he staying away a long while without writing?" exclaimed Dorothy, from one side of the fire.

"There's some mystery about it, I believe," said the shrewder Adela, from the other.

"Mystery? Do you imagine, child, that we are living in a three-volume novel?" demanded her aunt.

Neither of the girls knew more about Sir William's absence than the world in general, and Miss Pierrepont was determined that they should not guess.

"Of course," said the Squire, "the question for you to consider, Coverley, is what you are going to do?"

"I suppose you'll have to give up farming, Mr. Coverley," said Miss Pierrepont.

"Unless," said Coverley, "I go to Colorado, Canada, or South Africa."

"All overdone," said the Squire, "every jack one of them."

"I hear," said Coverley, "that they are opening out a new district in the West of Australia that's very promising. Coolgardie, I think they call it. It's a nice name; the name itself is enough to attract me."

"If you listen to me," said the Squire, "you'll stay at home."

"I have never been able quite to understand, Mr. Coverley," said Miss Pierrepont, with notable politeness, "why you had taken to farming."

"Why does a man take to anything, Louisa?" said the Squire. "Why does a labourer take to labouring, or a lawyer to lawing—or lying: they're much the same?"

"Or a thinker to thinking," suggested Adela, "or a squire to squiring—or squaring?"

"You hold your tongue, you monkey," said her father. "A man must take to something," continued he, "and he usually takes to what lies nearest."

"Like a thief to thieving," inserted Adela.

"Quite so, Robert," said his sister, rebuking her pet niece with a look; "but I have yet to learn that farming lay nearest to Mr. Coverley's hand."

"One thing, Miss Pierrepont," said Coverley, "lay about as near my hand as another. I began, however, by eating my dinners"—

"Good gracious, Mr. Coverley!" exclaimed Adela, "of course you did; and breakfasts and luncheons, too, I hope!"

"They didn't count, Miss Adela," said Coverley: "let me finish my statement—and *reading for the Bar*. You may not know I have been called to the Bar; that I am of Clement's Inn, like Justice Shallow, and a barrister-at-law."

"Are you a *barrister*?" cried Adela, sitting up.

"A *barrister*?" exclaimed her aunt. "And why

on earth did you turn farmer? A man learned in the law to begin handling sheep instead of sheepskin! Well, really!"

"I didn't know you were a lawyer, Coverley," said the Squire, with a singular air and eye of respect.

"Not much of a lawyer, Squire, though I have read some law-books."

"We must have more talk about that," said the Squire, "another time."

Coverley was amused by the interest evoked in the family by his declaring himself a barrister, and so he was provoked to greater interest in the fact himself. From that afternoon he began to look at his law-books again, and to his wonder he found that the cases of John Doe and Richard Roe were excellent reading; so much had his two years' experience of ordinary practical affairs opened his eyes to the general business of life. The Squire was as good as his promise, and returned to the fact of his being a barrister, with urgent reasons for a practical and public resumption of the character.

"It seems plain," said he, "you must drop farming and take to something else; why not that, when you've studied for it? I'm certain it's the one thing for you to do. You'll go to London, and you'll have some chance of meeting with Sir William; and that, as I've told you, is our one chance of getting to the bottom of this business of Philip's, which has more meaning in it than you think. My advice is, my lad, go and start your lawyering, and go soon, and leave farming to such as me and Evelegh."

Coverley said he would consider it, and he did. He was not an impulsive young man, though there was a strong central fire in him, which could be raised to furnace heat and force by due and proper admission of air. He considered himself and his prospects closely and carefully; he admitted the air gradually, and the fire burned up. Since his greater

intimacy with the Squire's family he was become conscious of a restlessness and an ambition working in him, which he had never before known. The slow, narrow range of a farmer's life appeared no longer so sufficient as it had seemed two or three short months ago, not even with a handsome, tender, and adoring wife for company and aid. Not that he was dissatisfied with his sweet Jenny, or loved her less; but that he began to cherish wider views and keener hopes both for her and for himself. Why should he make the beautiful Jenny a household drudge, as she would inevitably become as a farmer's wife (he recalled Sir William's warning)? and why should he reduce himself gradually to the condition of a locomotive vegetable? As it was practised, and as necessity, he feared, compelled it to be, why should farming be a nobler or more admirable occupation than many another? Now that his allowance was gone, he perceived what a soporific, satisfying, stupefying effect it had had on him, and yet he saw how little he could do without it in his practice of farming. The interest in his farm had lain in his experiments; he could risk no experiments if his living depended immediately on the profits of a farm, and he knew that the common round of farming, for which he did not care, but to which he would be bound, would dull and deaden him to the common level. He might even fail, and become like poor Evelegh!

Then his eyes would turn to London, "and his spirit would be gone before him, in among the throngs of men." He thought of the Squire's household,—the bright, attractive, quick, and eager-minded ladies, who had been so surprised that he, a mere farmer, should be a barrister; he recalled even Miss Philippa's easy and (he had thought) somewhat slighting treatment of him when she had been told he was a farmer,—though of the gentleman variety; and he was piqued that he must have been thought by these,

even when they were kindest, a person of little account, uninteresting on the whole, though agreeable and good-natured. Women, he told himself, as if it were the freshest discovery, like a man best who touches their imagination, who suggests to them striving and attainment. He would try his mettle, therefore; he would enter the ample arena of London, and with his education, his health, and his wits, see if he was not fit to hold his own, and more, with other men.

If these seemed obvious reflections and common resolves, let it be observed that I have no desire to make Coverley out to be an extraordinary young man Let it be considered, moreover, that though he was seven-and-twenty, he was truly young,—young in sentiment and in knowledge of the world, young in mind and in the practice of affairs. He was of his generation, which has insisted on regarding all men under thirty as little more than big boys, and rightly so. There have been generations when the world was inspired and ruled by young men—by boys, according to our modern view: John Keats took his seat next to Milton as poet before he was Coverley's age; and before that age, too, William Pitt was Prime Minister, and Napoleon Buonaparte a successful general; the age of youth may come again, but meanwhile the world is, and has been for long, inspired and ruled by fogeys, be the reason what it may.

Coverley's thoughts and resolves were in this hot and eager ferment when he was invited to eat his Christmas dinner at the Squire's. The Squire was somewhat sad on Christmas Day; his brother, Sir William, had been wont to join the family party, and his nephew Philip; now the one was he knew not where, and the other had fallen away from grace. Coverley was the only guest, and he was a stranger; but he was kindly taken in. From the point of view

of this story, the dinner was chiefly remarkable in that it was the last event in the Squire's life before a great trouble descended upon it; and in that then Coverley announced his intention of following the Squire's advice, going to London, and setting to work as a barrister. He had no intention of making the declaration, though all things in his mind and heart were ready for it; but the brightness and cheerfulness of the feast, the chastened heartiness of the Squire, and the beauty, grace, and kindness of the ladies touched him so to gratitude, that there came I know not what sudden condensation and contraction of intention in his mind; he felt he must show his appreciation of all he was experiencing, and he made his declaration.

It was received with rejoicing. The Squire proposed health and good luck, and his daughters, and even his sister, drank the toast with enthusiasm in champagne; and their eyes sparkled and their tongues were unloosed. Then the Squire talked to him with so much of the interest and affection of a father, and the girls treated him so much like a brother, that he was moved beyond his usual self-control: a lump rose in his throat, and a tear sprang in his eye. But the tear only made his eye look brighter, and no one seemed to suspect its presence.

"And when will you go?" asked Adela, ever the first with a question.

"As soon," answered he, "as I can find anybody to look after the farm during my remaining six months."

"That needn't take you long," said the Squire. "You can leave your foreman in charge, and I'll give an eye to him. There would be no sense in getting an expensive overseer for the little time there is to run. And you can come down yourself to stay over Sunday,—though it were only to show Philip that you are not driven out of the country after all."

Coverley assented that that might be the best arrangement, and so the matter rested. But, before anything could be finally arranged, there came a surprise upon the Squire which threatened a disruption of all his affairs.

The very next day the Squire received from Philip a startling note, to this effect:—There had come to the bank, addressed to Sir William, from the Messrs. Pound, bankers, of Lombard Street, London, a notice that a sum of thirty thousand pounds with interest at six per cent., borrowed three months ago, was now due, and that payment should be made within seven days. The bank, Philip declared, knew nothing of that, but apparently the Squire must know of it; for the bond, he was assured, was backed by Robert Pierrepont of Pierrepont Hall. Philip, thereupon, hoped his uncle and cousins had had a merry Christmas, and remained "faithfully yours,—for the bank, Philip Pierrepont." That was what Coverley would have called "a facer"; and the Squire set off incontinently to see Philip about it.

The bank was closed (for it was Boxing Day), but Philip was at home, and the Squire gave him a bad quarter of an hour.

"The money was borrowed for the bank," said the Squire, when he had introduced the matter he had come upon, "and therefore the bank must repay it."

"As I have told you, uncle," said Philip, "the bank knows nothing of it."

"But you knew of it at the time, didn't you?"

"Why should I know of it?" hedged Philip.

"Fee-fa-fo-fum!" cried the impatient Squire. "Answer a plain question: did you, or did you not, know of it?"

"I did not."

"Then, plainly, Philip, I don't believe you!" said the Squire. "And that's flat!"

"A man makes a statement: that's his affair. Whether it's believed: that's somebody else's affair."

"No, it is not; it's his affair, too. A man makes a statement in order to be believed, I suppose. If a man makes a statement that's not believable, that's incredible, it goes for nothing, it falls dead, rotten. Do you expect me to believe that in a big affair of that sort you didn't know what your senior partner had done? Stuff! Nonsense! Tell that to the horse marines!" Philip sat in silence, with tight mouth, but without display of temper, playing with a paper-knife. "I say," continued the Squire, "the bank must have had the money, Well? What are you going to do?"

"Nothing," answered Philip. "If Sir William borrowed the money, the bank knows nothing of it," he repeated.

"I suppose you mean, then, that your uncle borrowed the money, and used the money, for his own purposes?"

"Of that I say nothing, as I know nothing."

"And perhaps I had my share of it?" demanded the Squire.

"Of that also I can say nothing."

"'Pon my word!" exclaimed the Squire, looking round as if to address the world. "The fellow would traduce his own father, and sell his good name for a percentage! And you won't look into the matter, and save your uncle's credit? I know—I'm sure—the bank must have had the money!"

"If your temper were not dimming your understanding, uncle, you would perceive that I must have looked into the matter, before I could say that the bank knows nothing of the loan."

"My temper, you jackanapes! I am astonished and amazed that a fellow like you should wear the name of Pierrepont! And," said he, restraining himself, and striving to find in the metallic Philip

something to appeal to, "you don't care for the credit of your uncle, who brought you up, and put you where you are?"

"I am responsible," answered Philip, "for the credit of the bank, but not for Sir William's."

"Well, I am!" again broke forth the Squire. "And look here, Mister Say-nothing and Know-nothing and Do-nothing, I claim to see the books of the bank!"

"I'm afraid, uncle," answered Philip, with a smile of infinite venom, "that I cannot promise to oblige you."

The Squire stared for a moment, like a lion stung by a snake, and then his fury blazed forth. "You are going very far, nephew! You are playing all round the very devil's own game! I am an easy man commonly, but if you think you can provoke me like this, and not suffer for it, you're mistaken! I'm not a fool, Philip What's-your-name, and I tell you, by Heaven, you'll live to rue this twenty-sixth day of December! I'll see you yet in the felon's dock, or fleeing the justice of your country! For the present I've done with you! *I'll* see that my brother's credit does not suffer, though it should cost me my last penny!"

But Philip had the last word. With a look, sharp and flashing as a dagger, he said, "I'm afraid, uncle, you cannot help yourself; your name is on the back of the bond!"

CHAPTER XIX

NEW YEAR'S DAY, WITH A MORAL

TO profess that the Squire had never had any anxiety about that big loan which he had backed for Sir William, would be to declare that he was a very foolish person, with an infinitesimal sense of responsibility in making engagements, and with an infinite faculty for putting his head in a bag and thinking of nothing; but to declare that he ought to have anticipated such a surprise as that which had come upon him would be to misrepresent him as completely on the other side. He *had* thought with anxiety of what he had done; but he had assured himself again and again that there was no need for anxiety, for his brother (in whose honour and business exactitude he had entire confidence) would certainly have taken all due precaution and made all necessary provision for repayment. He now believed that if Sir William had left no express provision for the purpose, it must have been because he never doubted the bank's responsibility in the matter, and had been convinced of its ability to meet his engagement. But suddenly he bethought him of the "valuable papers" sent to him which Coverley had lost: he had not entertained the word "valuable" before in a pecuniary sense: what if these "papers" had been sent to meet this emergency?

"I have a very lively suspicion," he said to Coverley,—for Coverley was now as much his confidant as he was Coverley's,—"that that packet of mine you

lost contained something that would have taken the sting out of this business. If I could only have a word with my brother! I would advertise for him; but that would set people talking. My only hope of getting at him is in you, my lad: be off with you to London, and you'll be sure to run against Sir William one day; for the world, after all, is a wonderfully small place. William," he continued, "was always a terribly persistent fellow in going through with a thing he had begun. I expect he'll keep his word to that woman, and not show himself again till she's dead—and that," he added naïvely, "may be some time yet; so, my lad, my only hope of finding William is in you; and it is to your own interest, as well as mine, to find him."

But in the meantime there was an acute necessity of finding means for the payment of the thirty thousand pounds, "with interest at six per cent." That necessity became still more acute before the week was out with the receipt of notice direct from the London bankers, that the Pierrepont Bank having repudiated Sir William's engagement to repay thirty thousand pounds, etc., they must hold Mr. Pierrepont of Pierrepont Hall to the liability he incurred. The Squire wrote at once to his London solicitor, asking him to come down and consult with him on business of importance; and thus the affair hung when New Year's Day arrived.

For that day the Squire had invited his tenantry to supper and a dance at the Hall. No one in the Squire's household knew anything yet—not even his sister—of the dead-weight of anxiety and debt that had been suddenly hung about his neck, and the festive preparations went gaily forward.

They came at the appointed time, in gigs, in dog-carts, and in spring vans, the farmers and the farmers' wives, and the farmers' sons and daughters—all in their shiniest broadcloth and their best bibs and tuckers; and Coverley and John Evelegh and his

daughter came also among them. Evelegh was now settled at the Squire's Home Farm, and, though Jenny was thus closer at hand than she had been for three months, Coverley had not yet communicated to her his intention of removing himself to London. He had told her of his notice to quit Holly Bush (as well as of his having been ousted from Brockham), and he had thought that bad news enough until the other must be told.

That evening lived in Coverley's memory as the close of his rural experience. On looking back, it appeared to him like the last scene of an old-fashioned comedy, in which it is contrived that all the characters (except the villain) shall appear upon the stage and utter their last words,—little tags of jocosity or of sentiment,—before the curtain is rung down, the lights are put out, and audience and players alike go home to bed.

When host and guests all met in the drawing-room, Coverley and Jenny surveyed each other across a gulf in which dwelt her father: neither ventured at first to bestow more than the merest distant recognition on the other, for fear of awaking the wrath of the terrible Evelegh. Coverley noted Jenny, however, in comparison with all the other maidens present, and though she was far outshone by the brilliant beauty and charm of Adela Pierrepont (who sat a little while beside her) he found her sweet, cool demure, and lovely as an early summer morning. She was not the girl to provoke passion in a man, but to evoke the fullest gush of tenderness and affection. Jenny, on her part, was caused great searching of mind by his appearance. She had never seen him before in gentleman's evening dress, and she found him so grand and noble by comparison with all the farmers and farmers' sons,—there was only the Squire equal to him in appearance,—that she felt with a pang that he was far removed from

her. Though she continued to assure herself, "He is my lover! He loves me!" she was sad and lonely, and could scarce refrain from tears. How could she have the presumption to think of so resplendent a being as hers? How could she hope, in spite of all his loving and tender assurances, that she would be his wife? No. He would leave Holly Bush in six months; he would take a farm somewhere else,—far away,—and he would fall in love with a grander, a more beautiful girl than she was; for it was characteristic of Jenny that she thought little of her own beauty, but she knew she loved him with entire devotion, and it wrung her heart to think as she was thinking.

It was not according to the loftiest usage on such occasions, but it was what the farmers' families were accustomed to,—to eat supper and to dance afterwards; and it is according to the most ancient usage of human society, for is it not written, "They sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to play"? The Squire was a generous and thoughtful host: he did not give the fish and withhold the sauce; he did not only, that is, set his tenantry down to food and drink in his dining-room, but he also added such table display as he would have made had his guests been of the most select society. His guests tried to live up to the politeness and elegance of the occasion, all save Jenny Evelegh, perhaps (if exception must be made), who, though seated next to a very attentive and florid young farmer, could not keep her eyes or attention from Coverley, who presided at the end of the table near her, with Adela next him. It pierced Jenny with a sad new pang of jealousy to note how friendly and familiar they were with each other.

After the feast came the dance. On the slippery ballroom floor, amid strange flowers in pots and pictures in beautiful frames, there was some constraint at first. But that yielded soon to the hearty humour of the Squire, who led off the first dance with a farmer's

bouncing, buxom wife, and the easy and engaging manners of his ladies. The handsome room, the lively movements of the dances, the—no, the occasion was too new and solemn for indecorous laughter, —the music, the wax-candles that reminded of church, the rustling of best dresses, the shining faces,—all raised the feelings, and blended into an experience of a lofty state of existence, to be talked of and dreamed about for months to come.

Coverley danced the first dance with Adela, and Jenny went and hid herself in a corner, and shed a few bitter tears: she had had claimants for partnership enow, but she had reserved the first dance for him, and he had not asked for it! This loss of self-control, however, was but for a moment.

"I am a silly girl!" she declared to herself, drying her eyes. "He must dance with somebody but me, and why not with her, the handsomest, he being the handsomest too? Of course he couldn't ask me to dance, father being as he is;—and I can't dance well; —but he might have got a word with me! I am a miserable, heart-sore girl, but I won't let him see it."

It chanced that after the first dance Coverley found himself close to John Evelegh. They looked at each other; but Evelegh's look was quickly turned away, as that of a man ashamed. Coverley was encouraged to think, therefore, that Evelegh's resentment was dead, and that he might be approached again as a reasonable being, and, the excitement of the festive and friendly occasion impelling him, he spoke.

"So you're settled at the Home Farm, Mr. Evelegh," he said, with a friendly smile.

Evelegh looked astonished that he was addressed. "I don't know about 'settled,' but I'm there," he said, and looked away again. He evidently had no intention of being anything but polite, finding himself on the Squire's floor, and in his own fine linen and sumptuous satin waistcoat.

"And you've heard, I suppose," continued Coverley, "of what has happened to me? Brockham has not been lucky to me."

For an instant the fire seemed to wake in Evelegh's eye, but it died down, and, turning his head as if he would rather not look at Coverley, he said, "I hev heard. And I expected no more, nor no less. There's a God above, as I believe, and we don't take kind to new men in this country."

"Well," said Coverley lightly, "it's past. I won't deny I have been terribly disappointed." When he said that, Evelegh could not refrain from setting a burning eye of satisfaction on him. But Coverley did not note it, and he went on, "But, as I say, it's past; and I hope you are willing, Mr. Evelegh, to let bygones be bygones."

Evelegh glanced round him an instant, as if to assure himself where he was. "Bygones *is* bygones," said he, "and the Prime Minister of England and the Archbishop of Canterbury can't make 'em no other. But if a thing's done, it's done, and it's got to stay there done: mortial man can't undo it, and there en't no use trying." And with that he turned finally away.

Coverley did not quite understand what Evelegh meant by his last sentences, but he thought that they must imply friendly concession, and in the encouragement of that thought he went to seek Jenny out. He found her being led forth for the second dance, and he stood out and waited for her. When the dance was over, and she was led back to her seat, he pounced upon her.

"Jenny," said he in a low voice, "I must have the next dance with you."

"You can't," said she, smiling on him. "I have promised it already."

"You can forget that you have promised," said he

"But father!—what about father?"

"I have just been talking to him. I think he'll be all right," said he.

"Really?" she exclaimed, with delight. "Is that quite true?"

"Quite," he answered. "Come and I'll tell you about it," and she gladly allowed him to lead her away to a remote window recess, where they were not likely to be disturbed.

But Coverley did not dance with Jenny after all. They had been talking in confidence but a few seconds—(such things as my readers may imagine without my aid)—when the curtain that hid them from public view was tugged aside, and Jenny's father stood before them.

"I thought as much," said he, with his head towards his daughter, but his eye turned upon Coverley. "I knowed there was summat in your speaking to me so pleasant! Got round me—eh? Turned old Evelegh round your finger? You do beat the coolest of cowcumbers! But this is Squire's house, the 'All; and I won't forget myself, sir, in Squire's house. Come, my gell; you come wi' me!" and he seized her by the wrist. "You and me 'll go home! It's past my bed-time; that I can tell you."

Coverley was so amazed that he had nothing to say. Moreover, he wished to avoid anything like a scene. He merely bowed automatically when Evelegh led away his daughter,—a bow which was received by Evelegh with a fierce stare.

Coverley, piqued and humiliated, dashed into the excitement of the throng to assuage his pain, and he saw Jenny no more that night. In a little while his attention was engaged by an incident which attracted all eyes. He was standing close by the door, when he heard his name called behind him in an anxious whisper—"Mr. Coverley!" He turned and saw the door open a little way, and the head of Timmins inserted in the opening. He stepped up to him.

"There's a gentleman just arrove in a fly from the Junction; — says he comes on business with the Squire: Squire expects him, he says. Can't think how that can be," said Timmins; "for the Squire hain't told me nothing about it. I can't get at the Squire: will you tell him, Mr. Coverley?"

Coverley considered a moment. He knew the trouble the Squire was in, and one suspicion after another assailed him. Perhaps he would be doing the Squire a service, who had done him so many, by seeing first what manner of gentleman this was who came to the Hall at such an hour.

"I think, Timmins," said he, "I might see what this gentleman is like first. Did he give his name?"

"Yes, sir; Ridgeway, he said. He's waiting in the 'all with an eyeglass looking at the pictures."

Coverley went and found him as Timmins described.

"Excuse my coming at this unseemly hour, Mr. Pierrepont," he began at once. "My partner telegraphed to me at Seaford, where I was on business, to come to you. My train has been terribly delayed, but I thought I had better come on at once, as the business is urgent."

"I am not Mr. Pierrepont," said Coverley. "My name is Coverley. I am a friend of the Squire's; he was not immediately accessible; the message was given to me, and—in short, I have only come to see if he ought to be disturbed at present."

"Quite so," said Mr. Ridgeway. "I perfectly understand." He took a card from his pocket-book. "If you will kindly say I come on the part of Messrs. Beaumont, solicitors." And he handed the card with a bow.

Coverley returned to the ballroom, traversed it and found the Squire, and described to him what had passed. The Squire said "Thank you," and with the card in his hand went off to see the arrival. In a few seconds he returned, introducing to the wondering

gaze of the company an elegant young gentleman in a frock-coat, and with a flashing glass over his right eye.

"You said you would like to see my people dancing, Mr. Ridgeway," said the Squire, "so here you are. Look at the dancing as much as you like; it won't last much longer: and then I'll be at liberty to have a word with you. You are sure you don't mind being left to yourself?"

"Oh, not at all, Mr. Pierrepont, not at all," said the monocled young man. "Charmed, I'm sure."

And he stood aloof with his hands at his back and surveyed the company with an indulgent smile; and anon, wearying of that, he turned and looked at the pictures on the wall. Finally, the pictures seemed to interest him more than the company. He was out of harmony with the scene, and an interruption in the sweep of the company's enjoyment; and gradually the company felt it, and became self-conscious and constrained. He was the one blot in the bright field of the evening's entertainment, that at length spread and quenched it.

As the Squire walked down the room after leaving him, he was met by his sister.

"Who on earth is that, Robert?" she asked. She spied the card still in her brother's hand, and took it from him and read it. "Beaumont, solicitor? But that's not Mr. Beaumont!"

"No," answered her brother; "that's his partner. An obnoxious kind of ape, I think him; — don't know why Beaumont sent him;—coming at this time of night!"

"But you never told me anything of this, Robert!" said his sister in severe reproach.

The Squire looked somewhat guilty under his sister's eye. "No. I wrote to Beaumont that I wanted to see him on urgent business."

"What business, Robert?" demanded his sister.

"Some trouble you've been keeping from me, I warrant!"

"Hang it, Louisa!" exclaimed the Squire. "I'll tell you in the morning; I was going to do that in any case. But let us see to-night out in peace. We'll have to put the fellow up, of course. I've told Timmins."

"*I'll* see about it," said Miss Pierrepont, and went off straightway.

Then the company began to break up. All felt instinctively that something unlooked-for had happened, and they eyed with dislike the personification of the unexpected,—the Black Care passing slowly round the room and looking at the pictures, as if appraising their value. Doors were opened, and cross, chilling draughts came upon the ladies and made them pull their thick wraps about them; while out in the dark, wheels ground harshly on the gravel. The shining festive hours were gone; and had it been contrived, there could have been no more pointed, dramatic moral at their end than the arrival of the frock-coated solicitor with his shining eyeglass. After the feast comes the reckoning; and after giddy enjoyment, reflection. The presence of the stranger was as much a reminder of mortal care, as the appearance of a mummy at an Egyptian feast was of mortality. It was an excellent lesson for the close of New Year's Day.

CHAPTER XX

RAISING THE WIND

NEXT morning Miss Pierrepont waylaid her brother, to get from him the story of the business which had brought the young solicitor down upon them. She was jealous of her brother's confidence, for she was conscious she deserved it; when his confidence was given,—and it was seldom withheld,—she was lacking neither in generous sympathy nor in shrewd counsel.

"Why didn't you tell me at the time, Robert?" she asked in gentle reproach, when she had heard the story of the loan of thirty thousand pounds from its beginning three months ago. "I might have been able to help you and William both."

"Well, the truth is, Louisa," said the Squire, "that at first William asked me to keep the matter to myself, and then afterwards I began to be afraid I had done a foolish thing."

"William," said Miss Pierrepont, with some severity, "should never have asked you to do the thing, nor to keep it hid!"

"Poor William!" said the Squire.

"Poor William, indeed!" exclaimed his sister. "How is it that when a man ruins himself on account of a woman, men always pity him?"

"And women don't?" said the Squire. "'Pon my word, I haven't thought about it."

"And Philip!" said his sister, on a new tack. "I am shocked and disgusted with his conduct! I

think with you that the bank must have had the money."

The Squire's brow darkened. "If I'm spared," said he in solemn tones, "I and my house will have a day of reckoning with Philip!"

"Well," said his sister, "I don't yet see how to advise you about raising this large sum, but remember, Robert, before you talk over this matter with that young man, that my ten thousand is all at your service."

"And do you think, my dear," said the Squire, with unusual tenderness, "that I would take a penny of your little fortune?"

"Such as it is, Robert," said she, "it is all for you and the girls."

"It must be for yourself, my dear Louisa, as long as you live, and after that as you please; but the Lord bless you and keep you long to enjoy it." And he turned away with a tear in his eye.

Their talk was carried on as they paced on the terrace in the slanting sunshine of a mild January morning. When they re-entered the house, they encountered the young solicitor with Adela.

"I wanted very much to see your pictures again, Mr. Pierrepont," said the young man, "and Miss Pierrepont has been good enough to conduct me."

"You are fond of pictures, then, Mr. Ridgeway?" said the Squire carelessly.

"Art is my one hobby, Mr. Pierrepont, and I am fortunate in possessing a few good old examples inherited from my father."

"Oh, indeed!" said the Squire, looking on the young man with more respect.

When the post-bag was opened, there was found a letter from Mr. Beaumont, commending to the Squire's attention his junior partner, Mr. Ridgeway, who, the old gentleman said, for all his elegant and superfine airs, was an excellent man of business. That deepened

the respect which the Squire had begun to feel for the young man; so that when they sat at breakfast, and the young solicitor was more occupied with the young ladies than with his host, the Squire in noting him forgot to think of him as a "popinjay," and found him a rather remarkable person, cool, suave, and deliberate. He instantly began to think he would like to introduce him to Coverley; it would be so useful for a young barrister to be hand-in-glove with a clever and busy solicitor.

By the time, therefore, that they had retired to the study to talk of business, the solicitor was as high in the Squire's estimation as an hour before he had been low, and you could not have told from the manner of the young man that he was aware of either the depth or the height of the Squire's appreciation. The Squire told his story, and the young man made careful notes, now delaying the pace by asking quietly for "One moment," and again urging it on by saying, "And then?"

"The first thing, of course, that occurs to me," said he, when the whole tale had been gone through. "is this: Why has Sir William not paid the sum?"

"Sir William, I have no doubt," said the Squire, "expected the bank to pay; and he is not accessible at present to any news, he is away from home,—ill,—and will be away very likely for a long while."

"I see," said the solicitor, and made a marginal note. Had the Squire read that note, he would have been astonished. It stood thus: "(Query) *Banker brother in a madhouse.*" "The bank, I daresay," continued the young man, "can be made to pay ultimately; but that will have to be looked into; and that, and a law process, will take time."

"I'll have nothing to do with a law process," said the Squire promptly and firmly.

The young solicitor made another marginal note: "*Poor biz. No law. Why?*" Then he continued,

"In the meantime, then, it is necessary to find the money. That, I take it, is how the case stands?"

"And that, Mr. Ridgeway," said the Squire, "is why I have asked for legal advice—advice about the raising of the money."

"Quite so! Well, Mr. Pierrepont, you have some very valuable pictures. You have a Claude, for instance,—a beautiful Claude,—that I would give five thousand pounds for myself, if I had the money. And you have a genuine Watteau, that would fetch a bigger price, and others of the old French school."

"I knew they were genuine and good, but I did not know they were so valuable," said the Squire, with hearty interest.

"The old French school is in vogue just now," said the solicitor. "You couldn't have a better opportunity."

"What! Of selling them?" exclaimed the Squire with wide-open eyes.

"That is my suggestion, Mr. Pierrepont."

"But I don't want to sell them!" exclaimed the Squire.

"Many an embarrassed gentleman raises money in that way. You remember even the Duke of Marlborough and his Blenheim Raphael, which he sold to the nation for an immense sum."

"I hope," cried the proud Squire, "I have not sunk so low as to imitate the embarrassed conduct of a duke of yesterday! The Pierreponts were men of light and leading in the history of this country for centuries before the Churchills were heard of!"

The young solicitor raised an eyebrow and fixed his eyeglass (which he had been polishing with his silk handkerchief) to look at the simple country gentleman of mind so antiquated as to think more of himself than of a duke.

"You could easily raise your thirty thousand in that way, Mr. Pierrepont," said he. "And," he continued,

"the world, and your family even, need know nothing of it. I can introduce to you a clever fellow of an artist, who could copy them so that no one—not you yourself—could tell the difference; you would keep the cheap copies here, and he would take the precious originals over to the Continent to dispose of privately."

"Do gentlemen often do that?" demanded the Squire.

"They do indeed."

"Then," said the Squire, "I am ashamed of my order! And I won't do it! My great-grandfather himself brought these pictures you speak of from France, and there they shall hang—the genuine pictures, and not copies!—as long as I can keep them there by hook or by crook!"

The young solicitor sighed as if for the amazing degeneracy of proud country gentlemen, and then, bracing himself, he said, "Then, Mr. Pierrepont, I fear there is nothing for it but the good old-fashioned mortgage."

"Then, sir," said the Squire, with some heat, "the good old-fashioned mortgage be it! By that a man simply pawns something with a pawnbroker, as I understand, and does not part for ever with something he values!"

Their talk then fell on ways of accomplishing that business. Mr. Ridgeway was of opinion that the bankers who had lent Sir William the money might accept the Squire's mortgage as security for the repayment of the loan by certain instalments, and since that seemed the best and simplest method of accommodation, the Squire agreed that the solicitor should call upon the bankers as soon as he returned to London.

"You will stay to lunch?" said the Squire. "There is a gentleman coming whom I would like to introduce to you, a Mr. Coverley." (The Squire had sent a hurried message to Coverley with that view.)

"Mr. Coverley?" said the solicitor. "I think he made himself known to me last night?"

"True," said the Squire. "He did. You ought to know each other; he is a barrister going up now to London to practise; you may be of use to one another."

"What is his line?" asked Mr. Ridgeway at once.

"That I cannot tell you," answered the Squire.

"If it is criminal law, and he is a good speaker," said Mr. Ridgeway, "I know a leading counsel in criminal cases, who has an opening in his chambers for a junior." Seeing the squire in better countenance with that dangling promise, he had the hardihood to say, "You won't reconsider your decision about the pictures? I am plebeian enough, you know, Mr. Pierrepont, not to be ashamed of my suggestion."

"No more of that, if you please, Mr. Ridgeway. I should only part with those pictures if I were old and bankrupt, and then they should be sold openly with everything else."

Coverley came to lunch, and the young solicitor and he took kindly to each other. After lunch the solicitor departed, with the hope that he would soon see Mr. Coverley in town, and Coverley returned to his farm.

Then the Squire called his sister into council, and they sat down together in his study to consider their situation. They talked of it, and with pencil and paper calculated over and over again the figures involved in it until tea-time.

"I see only one thing to do, Louisa," said the Squire at length, contemplating his formidable array of units and noughts; "cut down expenditure. Even if they let the thirty thousand stand at six per cent.,—which I very much doubt,—that interest would come to eighteen hundred every year. What with one thing and another, my income is now something under four thousand. Take eighteen from forty, leaves twenty-

two; two thousand two hundred to live on and to pay off instalments of the thirty thousand!"

"My ten thousand paid to them now, Robert," said his sister, considering her own calculation, "would make the sum to stand at interest twenty thousand instead of thirty; twelve hundred interest instead of eighteen. And I've saved all these years quite enough to carry me along!"

"No, no; put that away," said the Squire hastily. "Don't tempt me, Louisa. I won't be tempted. Your money's your money; let it be. Where was I? Yes; twenty-two hundred to live on and pay off instalments. I ought to pay the two thousand off every year, and live on the two hundred!" He surveyed the figures again, and shook his head.

"Why not?" exclaimed his sister, as if seeing her way.

"Eh? Live on two hundred? If I could only make it up to five hundred somehow, we might manage. Gad, I will, though!" he exclaimed, jumping up and pacing rapidly to and fro, to the wonder of his sister. "I'll get it out of that Home Farm! And Evelegh shall help me! I'll turn myself into a market-gardener,—as I remember I onctwitted Coverley with being,—and I'll sell flowers and potatoes and asparagus!"

"Why, what's this now, Robert?" exclaimed his sister. "The prospect of reduced expenditure and of work seems to put new life into you!"

"It does!" said he. "I believe that's what I've been dying for all these years! Now, let us go and have tea!"

Sitting in the firelight of the drawing-room, over the cheering cup of Assam, he set forth to his sister and his daughters the plan of retrenchment and reform which had leaped full-grown from his head, like Minerva from the head of Jupiter. Almost all the servants must be dismissed; how many he was

not yet prepared to say; and a great part of the Hall must be shut up, for he would not let it; and they must all work, every one; work, he believed, was what they all needed.

"I have no objection to work, father," said Adela; "I have wanted to work for a long time; but I claim permission to work in my own way."

"What!" said her father, somewhat angrily; "with your fiddling, I suppose? You don't call that work, I hope?"

"No, father; I call it art, and art should never be work, for work is toil, and is associated with sweat of the brow, and sin, and all that kind of thing. Now, don't be a cross daddy; listen to me for once."

"As if I'm not always listening to you, for my sins!" said her father.

"Music is not work, but a good deal of money can be earned by it, and that's the only recommendation I know of work. Oh, do please listen to me, father! I'm utterly tired and sick of the life we lead here! I might as well be a sheep! I am growing as stupid as a sheep, and I am nearly as fat, and I haven't even the excitement a sheep has of being chased by a dog sometimes!"

"This is serious, my dear," said her father, surveying her with a puzzled look. "I'll talk about it with you by and by. But in the meantime, hear my plan about the Home Farm."

CHAPTER XXI

"ADIEU FOR EVERMORE, MY LOVE!"

IT was for the Squire not so easy a matter as he had anticipated to deal with and to allay Adela's restless desire for change. He made no account of the fact that for highly-strung natures excitement—such excitement as seems in the very air of a great metropolis like London, and which yearly draws thousands thither—is as necessary to health as was the "little wine" which Paul prescribed to Timothy for his "stomach's sake" and his "often infirmities"; but, being a loving and anxious father, he considered that her regard for her cousin Philip had been more serious than she had admitted, and was more difficult to shake off and kill than she had expected. For a day or two, therefore, he tried to dissuade her with argument and cajolery from her longing for London, and an active life there of her own choosing. He tried to make her shudder at the prospect of the fog and the mud of London at that season, at the loss of the freedom and the fresh air of the country, at the homesickness that would speedily seize her, and the pining for rides and drives; for, he assured her, though expenditure was to be terribly reduced, he was determined still to maintain a saddle-horse for his daughters and a vehicle for them all to drive to church in.

"What a child you must think me, father," she would make answer, "to imagine that I care a pin for the loss of a horse and a carriage! Don't you see

I've had too much of them? I am sick of the fresh air of the country, that seems so innocent and is not innocent at all, and of the simple country people, that seem so good and are really as wicked as they can manage to be. I am utterly tired of the country, father; it disagrees with me as much as milk did when I was a little girl; and I delight in the thought of the fog and mud, and the shops and the lights of London streets. And London is the only place for women to work in as they please, without being pointed at. I *do* want to work, father, and in my own way. All women work at something now,—or pretend to. Even titled ladies write articles in magazines; they bore me to read them, I must confess, but I daresay it didn't bore them to write them." Thus, as I have said, for a day or two, till at length she declared, "If you won't let me go kindly, father, I'll run away."

Then her father reflected that wilful woman will have her way; Adela was wilful, but she was docile enough to be open to conviction by experience. He would let her go to London to try the life she pined for, and a year or less would probably cure her of her infatuation. He took counsel with his sister, and they agreed that she should be commended to the care of a lady who had once been governess in the family, and who now kept a school in a London suburb. Since her purpose was what she called work, to send her to live with any loftier acquaintance or relative would be only embarrassing.

That arrangement was at once communicated to Adela, who accepted it with glee. While letters were being exchanged between the Squire and Miss Posner the governess, and while the Squire was wondering whether he must take his daughter to London himself, another event was brought to an issue. Coverley came to tell them that he had resolved to remove himself to London on a certain day,

and then it was proposed that he should take charge of Adela to the house of Miss Posner. But Miss Pierrepont doubted privately to her brother whether that arrangement would be quite seemly. The Squire did not heed her doubt; yet he was glad when the excuse for it was removed by the recommendation of his solicitor that he should go himself to London, and put his hand to the mortgage which was being effected.

Then came the adieus. Those adieus! Some shrink from them altogether as they would from a surgical operation, while others delight in prolonging them, as if they were bitter-sweet cordials. Why does your family, or your dear friend, or dearest sweetheart insist on seeing you to the train, hanging at your elbow while you buy your ticket, finding a seat for you, standing on the step of the carriage after the door is locked upon you, and even waving a hand or handkerchief as the train departs from the platform? Or, if you take a voyage, though it be only from London to Edinburgh, why will they insist on accompanying you on board, staying there till the gangways are removed, even sailing with you as far as Gravesend, and even then weeping as if the name of the place had a sinister meaning for them, and you were lost for evermore? Surely we British people take our partings too seriously. I prefer the mode of the American, who, I am told on credible authority, puts a paper collar, a tooth-brush, and a pair of slippers in a hand-bag, kisses his wife without emotion, says, "Wal, good-bye" (in the classic language of Mr. Howells), and departs on a tour of the world as if he were going "down town" for the night.

But all feelings are great or little only by comparison; and if there are no means of comparison, the little may bulk as hugely as the great. To Jenny Evelegh, who was quite untravelled, and who had

known no partings, her adieu with her lover was the most terrible trial she had ever endured. It was all the worse that she had not heard before of his contemplated removal to London; for Coverley, who took the surgical view of a parting, had put off telling her of his intention until the last moment.

They met at night in the sheltering and screening shade of a wild holly plantation between the two farms. It was thus in the dark, while each could see the other's face but as a dim suggestion, that Coverley told her he was going to give up farming—he was going away to London to be a lawyer, which he had begun to be before he took to farming,—and he was going away to-morrow. The three startling thoughts which drove the blood from Jenny's heart, and forced from her an eloquent cry of agony and despair were—"Lawyer! London! To-morrow!" and of all three perhaps the first was the keenest.

"Oh!" she cried. "A lawyer, and you never told me! But I was sure you were not really a farmer! Farmers don't talk as you do, nor dress as you do! And to-morrow! You are going away to-morrow!—going away before I have had time to think about it! Oh, it is very cruel of you not to have told me! And how can I think of my Lionel a lawyer in an office far away in London? But you can't be my Lionel any more! I shall never see you again, I know! Never! Never!"

"Jenny! Jenny!" he tenderly remonstrated, grasping both her hands in his. "What is this, my dear? Don't you understand? London is not so very far off, and I shall be down here at the end of every week, if I can manage it. We shall see each other almost as often as usual, and you can write to me; of course you will write to me, Jenny?"

But Jenny shook her head. "Oh, I don't know! I don't know! It will never be the same again! I can't think of you any more as just over at

Holly Bush, where I could see you if I went to the top of the Four-acre Field, and call you if I wanted you! No; never again! it will never be like that again! Away in London!—you might as well be in America! And a lawyer!—oh, how could I ever be a lawyer's wife? I couldn't! I wouldn't know how!" And she snatched her hands from him and covered her face.

"Jenny, Jenny!" cried he. "This is foolish and absurd. Why will you distress me so? You don't want to break my heart, do you?"

"Do I distress you, my dear?" she said. "No, then, I won't—I won't say these things! And I would far, far rather break my own heart than yours! But really, really—I think I have done wrong to love you at all. I am not fit to be your wife! I might be a farmer's wife, but not a lawyer's. I can't stand up against people! How ashamed of myself I was that night of the ball, when my father found us, and took me away! I know I should have said to him, 'You are behaving rudely, father; we are all the Squire's guests, and I have promised to dance with Mr. Coverley;' and I should have given you my hand and gone out with you, and father wouldn't have said anything for fear of a disturbance, and I should have had the dance with you I have never had!—and shall never have now!"

But her lover took her hands again, and drew her to him, and embraced her, saying, "Come, come, Jenny. You are only in low spirits; let me comfort you. And let us talk of what we shall do. Why do you make so much, my dear, of my trying to be a lawyer? Haven't I told you all about it, Jenny? Philip Pierrepont has turned me out of both farms which I hold from Sir William. I am a quiet fellow; but do you think I am so tame as to submit completely to be turned out, and go away to farm somewhere else, away from you, my dear, and everybody

I know? No, I can't do that. The Squire and I are agreed that to set things right, both for myself and him,—and I have caused him great loss by losing those papers; how much loss we can't tell,—I must find Sir William. That's my *real* business in going to London—to find Sir William. But that may take a long time, and I must do something to live, and why not what I tried to do before I took to farming? Don't you see, sweetheart? And then I may make money, and buy the farms, and be able to do with them what I like. Won't that be nice, even if I continue to be a lawyer,—to have a place to come to in the country whenever we like, away from our little home in London? And even now I shall see you at the end of every week, and in the middle of the week we shall write to each other, my dear, what we have been doing; and I'll write to you how much I love you, and you'll write to me how much you love me."

And thus they continued to talk, and it was inevitable that he should communicate his temper and his view to Jenny, for what is love as distinct from mere passion, but this intermingling and community of feeling and temper and expectation? So they ended their adieu, and Coverley finally left her, he conceived, hopeful and brave.

But it chanced that next morning Adela went to the Home Farm to say "good-bye" to Jenny.

"Are you going to London too?" asked Jenny, while a demon of suspicion whispered in her ear. "Have you been long thinking of going there?"

"Oh yes, my dear Jenny, a long time," answered Adela; "though I have only insisted on going since father has said expenses must be reduced, and we must all be busy. I wish you were going too, Jenny. Won't you come? Wouldn't it be nice to be in London with Mr. Coverley, Jenny?"

Jenny blushed scarlet; but she replied somewhat bitterly, "And what could I do in London, Miss

Adela? Go into a shop, perhaps: I am not clever enough to do anything else. And how would Mr. Coverley, the lawyer, like that?"

"Perhaps he wouldn't," said Adela, considering her with curiosity.

"No," said Jenny; "I'll stay where I am,—with my father, and help him and the Squire."

"Why, father says," observed Adela, "that he is going to be a market-gardener, and grow flowers and potatoes, and things of that kind."

"I think I shall like that very much," said Jenny. She added meditatively, "Mr. Coverley was to have grown those things." Then,—"Shall you see much of Mr. Coverley when he is a lawyer up in London?"

"I may see him sometimes," said Adela carelessly, a carelessness which Jenny suspected; "I daresay I shall. We are going to travel up to London together this afternoon."

"Oh, you are?"

"With my father," added Adela hastily.

Soon she took her leave, and Jenny from that hour caught jealousy to her bosom. She had been jealous of hearing so much of Adela from Coverley as she had heard lately; she had been jealous of the terms on which they appeared to be with each other on the night of the ball; and though she had then put jealousy away from her as mean and unworthy, she now caught it back eagerly. Why did *she* go to London, she asked herself, just when *he* went? And why did she decline to confess that she would be seeing him—*must* be seeing him—almost every day? So Jenny cherished the ugly demon changeling Jealousy in place of the bright and beautiful divinity Love,—and she was not happy.

CHAPTER XXII

PHILIPPA LOOKS INTO IT

THE day before her departure to London, Adela had called upon Miss Philippa Pierrepont to bid her good-bye. She liked Philippa, and Philippa had in many ways shown a liking for her, and she had thought it would be but civil and friendly to go and give her cousin a precise account of what would be sure to enter into inaccurate gossip. But having declared that she was going to London to "work," she had also to relate in answer to Philippa's judicial questioning what had immediately led to her migration—her father's responsibility for Sir William's debt.

"But," exclaimed Philippa, "do you mean Sir William went off and left that unprovided for?"

Upon which Adela found it necessary to explain that her father thought that Sir William, like himself, believed the bank would pay it, and that he imagined further that Sir William had made some provision in case the bank should not be able to pay; and she told what she knew of Coverley's loss of the "valuable papers" entrusted to him by Sir William, and, led on by that recital, she told also of Coverley's own loss, and of the harsh treatment which that entailed on him from Philip.

"All that is new to me, my dear!" exclaimed Philippa, stroking her chin as if it were covered with a beard, and tugging manfully at the knee of her skirt, according to her habit when anger and resolu-

tion were rising in her together. "It needs looking into. Has your father looked into it?"

"I believe he has, cousin," said Adela doubtfully.

"And not seen to the bottom of it, I suppose?"

"How far down he has seen I really can't tell you, Philippa," answered Adela; "but I've seen him look very grim over it, and frown and nod and tighten his lips and say, 'Master Philip is playing a very queer game! He had better take care!'"

"Oh, he says that about Philip? Well, I'll look into it, and see what I can see. And your father is going to reduce expenditure, is he?—reduce it very much? Well, that's brave of him. But it's rather mean in you to run away from him just at this crisis, isn't it?"

Adela was caught between tears and resentment. She looked at her cousin and demanded what she meant. "What do you think I am going away for, Philippa? Do you think I am going to amuse myself, and to have greater comfort than I would have at home? I am not looking forward to anything of the kind! If my father really needed me at home, I would stay at home and do anything he wished me to do! But he doesn't need me, and I can do more for him—at least, I think I can—in London than at home! I would do anything for my father!"

"That's the kind of thing," said Philippa, considering her shrewdly, "that a girl usually says about the man she is in love with."

"Well," said Adela, blushing, "I'm in love with my father: he is the best man I know."

"I beg your pardon, my dear, for saying what I did. I ought to have understood better, I confess. Women are always sacrificing themselves for somebody or other. That's the worst of them: they have too much heart. If they were as selfish as men, they would easily have the upper hand. But, may I ask, how do you propose to help your father from

London? Not by giving violin lessons, I suppose? You will hardly do more than keep yourself in tha way."

"I was going to tell you," answered Adela. "But it's a secret, remember. I think that in a little while I can make money—a great deal of money—by giving concerts. I believe I play very well, and—and I think I am not bad-looking." She hesitated and blushed. "I would not use my own name, you know. You are not shocked, are you?"

"Shocked? Why should I be shocked? Why shouldn't you make a living—and more—by doing as well as you can what you can do? You know *I'm* not bound by conventionality. If I thought I would like to wear trousers, and be more comfortable in them than in a skirt, I would wear them. No; what troubles me is your heart. Heart is the ruin of women. And you are good-looking," she actively mused, tugging again at the knee of her skirt. "If you begin to appear in public, all the men will be worrying you with their attentions. They can't help it, and you can't hinder it. You must have somebody to go about with you; a watch-dog, to bark at the men and frighten them off; and I suppose that governess can't. Look here, my child—if I come to see you one day with a portmanteau, don't be surprised. Now you'd better go. I must see Philip before the bank closes, and it's time you went back to your father. Don't forget to write to me."

Now from that visit of Adela's to Philippa sprang two or three events of consequence. Philippa first went to Philip, to bring him, literally, to book about the loan which Sir William had contracted before he went away. But though she was astute, she was not dishonest, and truly had little working suspicion of dishonesty in others, while Philip was both astute and dishonest, and could cloak both qualities in a show of candour. He protested (as he had done to the

Squire) that the bank knew nothing of the loan, and, without being urged, he produced the books of the bank, to show her that they bore no record or trace of the loan, or of the sum under any recognisable denomination. What could Philippa do but accept as conclusive such apparently sufficient evidence as Philip tendered? She did not know that on the very day of his return from the negotiation of the loan, Sir William had gone away, and that the interval between his return and his departure was filled with strange and distracting matters; and, in her peculiarly partial dislike of Philip, she did not go so far as to suspect that if Sir William did not set down in the books some record of the loan, his nephew would not. So Philippa departed with her hands in her pockets, fighting inwardly against the suspicion that Sir William had carried off the thirty thousand pounds, while Philip smiled craftily behind her ample back.

"I don't believe William would have done such a thing!" she declared finally to herself. "He got it for the bank, and if it did not go into the bank, it must be lying hid somewhere! It will turn up, I daresay, some time or other. But now I must see Cousin Robert: he is a good creature, though prejudiced, and I am not going to let him bear the brunt of this."

She had declared with contemptuous energy to Adela that the ruin of women is their self-sacrifice, and here she was ready to sacrifice, if not herself, her substance, for the sake of the man she had once loved. It is not only the wicked who divorce profession from practice; but, whereas the wicked are worse than their professions, the really good are better.

She had to wait for the Squire's return from London, whither he had conducted his daughter. But as soon as she could discover he was back, she

called on him. She drove her own fat cob to Pierrepont Hall, accompanied by her own fat coachman. There was a sensation when she was seen emerging from the avenue of limes.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Miss Pierrepont to her brother. "What fright is this? I believe it's Philippa, driving like Jehu! What can *she* want?"

The Squire only stared, and went out to receive his cousin courteously, but coldly, after a tacit estrangement of years.

"How do you do, Philippa?" said Miss Pierrepont.

"I am very well, thank you, Louisa," answered Philippa. "It's a cold day, isn't it?" And she beat her gloved hands together. Then, turning to the Squire, she said, "What a beastly hilly road it is that leads here, Robert! I had forgotten it was so hard for a stout horse."

"Yes," said the Squire; "it's a long time, I suppose, since you travelled it, Philippa."

"It *is* a long time, Robert." (And that was all the allusion made then to their estrangement.) "I want a quarter of an hour's talk with you, if you can spare me the time."

"An hour if you like, Philippa," said the Squire, with a feeling of generosity.

"I think a quarter will do," she answered.

The Squire led the way to the drawing-room, and Philippa followed.

"H'm!" said she; "I don't like a drawing-room for business. Haven't you a den of your own, Robert, where you keep your whips and guns, and pretend to read?" With a smile and a lifting of the eyebrow, the Squire led her to his "study." "Ha!" said she, at once drawing up a chair to the fire. "This is better. Sit down, Robert, and let us spend my quarter of an hour with economy." Spreading herself to the grateful warmth of the fire, she set forth what she had happened to hear (she said) of his vicarious

endurance of Sir William's debt. Considering the character of the debt, she had thought it strange that the bank should not be liable; and, having an interest in the bank, as she supposed the Squire had heard—

"I *have* heard of it," said the Squire.

"I went to see the books of the bank," said Philippa.

"Well?" demanded the Squire, with acute interest.

"Philip showed me the books, and I must say that I could discover no record or trace of the money."

"I don't believe it!" exclaimed the Squire.

Philippa turned her eyes on him. "You don't mean that I'm telling you a lie, Robert?"

"No, Philippa, I don't mean that. I mean that I don't believe the bank has not had the money; and I mean that Philip has managed to hoodwink you; and if you have come to me as his apologist, your errand will be wasted!"

"Hoity-toity, Robert! Why should I trouble myself to vindicate Philip? Let him look after his own reputation. Why don't you hear me out? You are wasting my quarter of an hour. All that I've said is only preface. It's for Sir William and you I'm concerned: you didn't do me that credit, I suppose? Never mind. Whatever has become of the money,—my own opinion is that it's lying hid somewhere,—we shall never know till we see Sir William again."

"Well?"

"Well, I think it very hard that you, with your family and your responsibilities as head of our house,—that you should have to bear the burden of the debt; and I want to ask you, Robert, to let me pay it."

"Let you pay it, Philippa?" said the Squire, in a kind of tender amazement.

"Why not?" said Philippa, tugging after her fashion at the knee of her skirt. "I am quite able!"

"But I have just made arrangements for paying it, Philippa. I have just signed a mortgage,—not a very hard mortgage after all,—and set everything in order for reducing my expenditure."

"But," said Philippa, "the mortgage can be cancelled, and your expenditure need not be reduced."

"Yes," said the Squire; "but the fact is, Philippa, I expect a good deal of enjoyment out of paying this off; I'll have to work, and I'm beginning to find that I have been pining for work all my days. And I'm a kind of obstinate fellow: when I've got my foot well into a track, I don't like to be turned back; and the long and the short of it is, I don't think I can let you take my responsibility off me." His tone was much gentler than it had been: it was almost deprecatory. "I recognise completely," said he, "your tender kindness and—and intention, Philippa, but I can't let you do it. 'Pon my word," he broke out, "women are good creatures! There was Louisa the other day begging me on her knees almost to take her ten thousand! And now!"—he added, with an eloquent gesture towards Philippa.

"Well," said Philippa, "I think all the more of Louisa for it!"

"Philippa," said the Squire suddenly, with a somewhat embarrassed cordiality, "I owe you a very humble apology for having seen so little of you for a long time."

"'Master Shallow,'" she quoted, with a laugh, "'I owe you a thousand pound.' My quarter of an hour is up," she added, and rose.

The Squire took her hand. "I will take it as a kindness—as a favour, Philippa, if you will sometimes come and see us."

"Certainly I will, Robert," said Philippa, returning his pressure; "let us say no more about it."

There was a third thing Philippa was bent on doing: on visiting the woman who claimed to be

Lady Pierrepont, with the object of persuading her to abandon her claim for public recognition, so that Sir William might return to his proper place in East Dormus, and set those things right that had gone awry. Ever since Philip had communicated to her Sir William's secret, the imagination of such a visit had attracted her, and now its fulfilment had become urgent. She had doubted the advantage of an appeal to Sir William's wife, but now she encouraged herself with the Squire's saying, "'Pon my word, women are good creatures!" and made arrangements to go to London next day.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE LADY AND THE STAGE LADY

MANY people find the swift motion of a train provocative of thought. Anthony Trollope wrote novels in trains (though that may argue little of his provocation to thought); clergymen have invented some of their most taking metaphors in trains; and in the express to London Miss Philippa Pierrepont could not read for thinking. Seated behind her newspaper, with her eyes on the fast-flitting landscape, she speculated on the interview she was going to seek. She proposed to gain her end, not by craft or threats, but by an appeal to the better nature of the woman,—to that passion for sacrifice with which she believed every woman afflicted in some degree, and of which she sometimes could speak with contemptuous energy. She intended, further, to put herself somewhat on the actress's level by letting her know that she also had once loved the man of whom they would speak, and that she would probably have become his wife had he not been reft away from her by the more dazzling charms of the actress!—all that she had already determined on; but what she still debated with herself was, how she should appear. Should she show herself in the ordinary dress she wore out of doors, and in which she knew she appeared to most eyes unattractive and eccentric, if not ridiculous; or should she array herself in such attire as a lady commonly appears in at the theatre? That she found hard to decide. She could

not see that much was to be gained for her purpose either way; and since no woman ever yet gratuitously looked her worst before another woman who might be deemed a rival, she let personal feeling have way, and resolved to dress and take a seat in the theatre; to which decision adhered the advantage that she might thus be able to form some opinion of the temper and character of the actress. In that hope she (the acute reader will perceive) showed how little she understood the histrion, male or female; for if the actress habitually showed something of her native character in the part she played, where would be her acting?

At eight o'clock, when the curtain went up, Philippa sat in her seat in the back row of the stalls, attired in a manner becoming a lady in the most fashionable part of the theatre. The comedy was still playing which Sir William and the Squire had witnessed together, so that it was not till towards the end of the first act that Philippa's attention was seized by the entrance of Mrs. Stonebridge. She appeared with a *staccato* peal of laughter which made Philippa sit up and use her eyes at once. When she saw the old and raddled appearance of the lady of quality whom Mrs. Stonebridge represented, she exclaimed to herself, "What a dreadful woman!" and her heart sank at the prospect of her interview. But on raising her glass to strengthen her vision, she saw that Mrs. Stonebridge, if stripped of her war-paint, might still seem tolerably young and handsome. She listened attentively to her tones, and though she thought them vulgar, she believed there was an underswell of good-nature in them. When the act was over, therefore, she went out to seek her interview. She appealed to a very splendid gentleman in evening dress whom she saw come out of the little box-office, and whom she therefore judged to be the functionary known as Acting Manager—which means, in theatrical phrase,

not the person who manages the acting, but the person who acts as manager in what is known as "the front of the house."

"You are the manager, are you not?" said Philippa. The splendidly attired and moustached gentleman bowed. "Do you think I can have a few minutes' talk with Mrs. Stonebridge—now, or later?" continued Philippa.

The splendid gentleman considered her closely. "I don't know, madam," he answered. "You see, Mrs. Stonebridge appears in the piece."

"I know that," said Philippa, with her usual independence, which made the splendid gentleman think her, doubtless, a lady of position. "What I mean is, has she time now, or will she have time later, for half an hour's interview? And is it, or is it not, against your rules to admit me behind the scenes during the performance?"

"Our rule is, madam," said he, trying to look severe but regretful, "no admission behind the scenes, but"—

"I imagined," interrupted Philippa frankly, "that that was only meant to apply strictly to troublesome gentlemen?"

"Well, yes, madam," said the splendid gentleman, smiling, and drawing out his fine moustache, as if he would not mind being classed among the "troublesome gentlemen" himself. "Mrs. Stonebridge has quite half an hour to spare now, but she may happen to be engaged with a friend."

"What! a gentleman?" demanded Philippa sharply.

"She has a brother, madam, who waits upon her, as, I daresay, you know."

"No; I know nothing about it," said Philippa. "There is my card: will you be so good as to send it to her?"

"Certainly, madam," said the splendid gentleman and turned, reading the card. When he saw the

name, his eyebrows went up in increased respect, and he gave Philippa a fresh glance of scrutiny. Then he called a fireman, to whom he gave the card, with instruction to find so-and-so, who would take it to Mrs. Stonebridge, and bring back an answer.

In less than five minutes the fireman returned, the splendid gentleman came to Philippa and said, "This way, madam," and she disappeared through a swing-door and was behind the scenes. She overheard the splendid gentleman say to the fireman when she passed into the charge of the call-boy, "So her ladyship seems to have some swell friends after all," but she gave no heed.

"Lady for Mrs. Stonebridge!" cried the boy, flinging open a door, and departed whistling.

Philippa entered, and saw and heard three ladies of quality out of the comedy talking very loud and very fast, with many vocative "dears"; they evidently had not heard the boy announce her. Mrs. Stonebridge first caught sight of her, and stood silent. Then the others, seeing her thus, followed her fixed look, and discovered Philippa.

"Oh," they said, "this must be your lady visitor, dear." And they swept out.

When they were left alone, they eyed each other an instant as if they were about to engage in a duello. Then Philippa made an advance.

"You are Mrs. Stonebridge, are you not?" said she, taking a step forward, and smiling—and she had a pleasant smile.

"I am known as Mrs. Stonebridge," answered the actress, with a bow; "though I have as much right to Pierrepont as you!"

"Scarcely," said Philippa, smiling again; "I was born to the name, and you were not. But never mind that. Let us agree that you have a right now to the name which you do not put in force. He married you as Stonebridge, I suppose?"

"Yes; the deceiving villain!" exclaimed the actress.

"I daresay," observed Philippa, smiling still, "your husband intended it for the same thing. Stonebridge is, after all, only English for the French Pierrepont. It's a pretty free translation, but I've no doubt it was intended for the same name." The actress looked as if that had not occurred to her before. "I want to have a little talk with you about my cousin, if you can spare the time. May I sit down?"

She sat down, and the actress sat down also.

"Your cousin?" exclaimed the latter. "I thought he must be your brother."

"If he had been my brother," said Philippa, "I should probably not be still Miss Philippa Pierrepont."

The actress was bristling with dignity and suspicion. "That may be interesting for you, but I don't see what it has to do with me."

Philippa was resolved to placate her by any means. "It has something to do with you, for you, Lady Pierrepont, married the man whom I was engaged to; you are my successful rival."

"I think," said the actress, "it's a great pity you didn't have him." And with a practised eye she rapidly reckoned up such superficial attractions as Philippa still possessed.

"I think so too," snapped Philippa involuntarily, while she thanked goodness she had dressed so that the actress could not call her a scarecrow. "But let us not be personal."

"I have no wish to be," said the other, with tolerable suavity, for her voracious sense of dignity in the presence of her husband's relation was somewhat appeased by hearing herself addressed by her title; it was a small concession, but she took it as significant. "My time is passing," she added. "I shall have to go on again in a little while. What is it you want to say to me?"

"Lady Pierrepont," began Philippa earnestly,—and the habit of plucking at the knee of her skirt asserted itself,—' your husband is living poorly and obscurely somewhere in London, hid from all his friends; he must be living poorly, because he took no money with him, and he draws no money; the only money he left instructions to be paid was seven pounds weekly to a London solicitor: that, I presume, was for you?"

"I draw seven pounds a week," answered the actress; "and little enough it is as allowance to a lady in my position, when my husband has his hundreds of thousands."

"There you mistake. He has handed complete control of the bank over to his nephew, and if he stays much longer away, he will probably lose all interest in it, and have nothing."

"Oh, tell that to the supers, madam!" exclaimed the actress, opening and shutting her fan again. "I don't believe it!"

"But it's true; I know it," pursued Philippa steadfastly. "A bank is not such a safe thing always as you may think. Your husband was scarcely gone from his place at the head of the bank when there was a run upon it,—you know what that means, I suppose?—and it was only saved from breaking by me: I drew all my fortune out of another bank, and risked it—I am risking it at this moment—to save the credit of my cousin, your husband, and the honour of the family."

"If it pleased you to do that, madam," said the actress, still playing with the fan, "because of your tender recollections, I suppose, of more than five-and-twenty years ago"—

"Exactly," said Philippa, accepting the reason with a blush, but with a hearty promptitude which embarrassed the actress for a moment.

"Still, I don't see," continued the stage lady, "what the credit of my husband and the honour of your family have to do with me."

"I thought, madam," retorted Philippa, with a caustic smile which was irrepressible, "that you set some value on being called Lady Pierrepont, and that your desire is to identify yourself with our family; and I wished to point out that a bankrupt husband and a disgraced family would not be of much advantage to you."

"But am I the cause of his being almost bankrupt and of his having disgraced his family—but for you?"

"In a sense you are," answered Philippa; "for it was because of you he left his proper place and hid himself in London. And I wish to appeal to you, as a right-feeling woman, Lady Pierrepont, to make it possible for him to return before it is too late. For the bank needs his attention, if he would not lose it altogether; and two innocent men are almost ruined through some business that only he can put straight—his brother and a young neighbour. You saw them both here, I have understood, when Sir William disappeared."

"You mean the other Stoney," laughed the actress. "Poor dear! And the young gentleman with him—I remember him very well. He was very handsome; and he kept his eyes on me all the time, as if he would eat me, but he never said a word!" And again she laughed. "What do you want me to do?"

"To withdraw, for the present, the claim you suddenly made on Sir William, and which made him disappear."

"What? And let him go back and go on as he was, while I hang on here, a poor utility actress? Of course you only think of him and your precious family! I'm nothing! I'm to be sacrificed! I'm

a low actress that can't be recognised by the family"—

"If you knew me," interrupted Philippa quietly, "you would know that I have no prejudices of that kind." But her interruption was swallowed up in the torrent of the other's wrath.

"But I count for something to myself, and I'll not give up my rights! I'll be salted and peppered!—hanged, drawn, and quartered first! What is your family to me? A lot of sham, stuck-up aristocrats!—and I'll see them in black disgrace and ruin, and all their neighbours too, before I give up one scrap or iota of my rights!" And she banged the closed fan on her dressing-table.

That was become a situation in which Philippa always believed she could shine. Angry people never tempted her to anger; she saw the humour of their rage, and she could remain calm, and commonly reduce them to reason.

"I understand your point of view," said Philippa, "and I sympathise with your wrongs; but you have got so angry you have not understood me. A wife's place is by her husband's side, I grant you—unless she has forfeited it by misconduct, and even then I'm not sure—I would not like to pronounce." In saying that she carefully refrained from looking at the actress, who tapped impatiently with her fan, and beneath whose paint and powder a sudden flame rose and sank into her neck. "I do not ask you," continued Philippa, "to abandon altogether your claim to share your husband's position. I said, 'for the present'; and I meant that you should in the meantime try to win back your husband's love. When that was done, he would—I am sure—of his own accord put you in your rightful place."

"My husband's love?" laughed the stage lady. "*His* love! He was always a poor stick at love! *I*

don't want his love! And I never did!" she added, looking Philippa frankly in the face.

"Oh!" said Philippa, for an instant at a loss. "Do you think it would be worth your while to be acknowledged by your husband as Lady Pierrepont, without his love, without his liking, without his goodwill even?"

"Worth my while? I should think it was!" exclaimed the other. "I'd soon show you! I wasn't born yesterday! I'm not a maiden lady!—and I know my way about!"

Philippa began to find her hold of the situation slipping. This was not the kind of woman she had expected to meet. This was a kind of woman who belied human nature; whom she had hitherto thought existed only in the debased imagination of novelists and playwrights. She had manfully to maintain her hold (plucking at the knee of her dress the while), and, seeing an opportunity for reply in the stage lady's own line of view, she said—

"But if your husband were ruined in the meanwhile, where then would you be?"

"I have taken care that's not likely to happen," answered the other. "I gave him six months to repent of his obstinacy and to give me my rights! If, on the twenty-fifth of March this year,—which landlords, and aristocrats, and tax-collectors, and that kind of person, call Lady Day,—he hasn't of his own accord done me justice, then"—and she made an admirable flourish with her fan and her arm—"I go down to this place you call East Dormus, assert myself as Lady Pierrepont, and scandalise the family!" And she laughed at the prospect.

Philippa felt her hold growing still looser; but still she struggled, with good temper and good feeling.

"But, my dear Lady Pierrepont," said she, "where

would be the advantage—when it was all done—of making yourself a by-word at East Dormus for stupid farm-labourers, and stable-boys, and grocers' assistants,—excuse my saying so, but that, I assure you, is how it would be,—and scandalising the family you would claim to belong to?"

"I would, at least, have the satisfaction of doing it!" And the actress fanned herself furiously, as if in anticipation of her enjoyment.

A new vent of appeal opened before Philippa. "Lady Pierrepont," said she, "have you any children?"

The reckless stage lady was hit by the chance shot. Her fanning ceased, her bold look fell, her flashing glance wavered, and she answered, "I had a little boy. He was taken from me when he was three. Never will I forgive his father for that! He thought, I suppose, I was not fit to bring him up!"

"Perhaps," said Philippa calmly, "you were not—at least, if you continued to be an actress."

"And whose fault," broke forth the actress, "was it that I continued to be an actress? *I* didn't want to keep on the stage! What did I marry *him* for, but to be a proper lady of the land, when I could have had earls and dukes, with their diamonds and their cheques?"

Philippa continued her appeal. "But your little boy," said she, "has been very likely well cared for by your husband. Sir William is not a man, I am sure, to neglect anyone that belonged to him, and especially his own son. He—your boy—will be Sir William's heir—heir to the baronetcy, and everything else, whatever that may be. Would you like—I ask you—your boy to hang his head in shame for his mother when her name might be mentioned by jeering men, at East Dormus or anywhere else?"

The mother was staggered—stage lady though she was—by the suggestion. She had not, probably, imagined that before: her fancy and her temper had been too lazy. Then, finding no sufficient reply, she fell tooth and claw upon Miss Philippa.

"Show me my boy," she answered, "and I'll tell you! But don't think you are getting round me by your arguments and your carneying! If I had had my little boy with me all these years, I'd have done my duty by him as well as any lady!—and no nonsense either! But if he has been brought up like a prig in some swell boarding-school, with never a word of his mother, he may be ashamed if he hears of her, though she has pleased better than him in her time! But, look you here, Miss Philippa Pierrepont," she raged, shaking her fan at her visitor, "don't you think you're going to traduce me into dropping my rights, for all your talk about my boy, and loving my husband! Loving my husband, indeed! You've helped me in that all these years, for all I know! And nice little quiet games you've had together, I'll be bound!—And I shouldn't be surprised if that isn't why you're so eager to have him back down there! Oh, keep your hair on!"

Philippa had risen, flaming at last under insult hideous and gratuitous.

"Lady Pierrepont," said she, with dignity, "I see it is useless to appeal to you. I thought that, in coming to talk to you, I should meet at least a human being. You are merely a low woman, madam."

And she swept out as the call-boy opened the door, calling, "Mrs. Stonebridge, *please*!" Led by him, she passed back to the front of the house, and so out of the theatre; after her exciting *entr'acte* she wanted no more play-acting that night. And as she was driven to her hotel, she thought that perhaps she had made a mistake in dressing for the

theatre at all. Had she appeared more dowdy and eccentric, she might have escaped that final insult.

"The world is hard on women," she said to herself; 'but hardest of all are other women."

CHAPTER XXIV

A SOLICITOR IN SEARCH OF EXCITEMENT

WHILE Philippa returned to her hotel thus defeated and cast down, Coverley sat smoking with Ridgeway, the smart young solicitor, in the club of the latter. Coverley had established himself with Marmaduke Flynn, the famous Irish criminal pleader, called "Marmy" familiarly by his clients of the Old Bailey and Quarter Sessions. He hired of his chief what was euphemistically called "chambers," but what, in bare reality, was a single dingy room, which served the triple purpose of office for himself (with his name painted on the door), sitting-room, and bedroom, its night function being discreetly disguised by his bed appearing a chair by day: to that restriction of housekeeping was he confined by the modesty of his means and the dearness of accommodation in the Temple of nowadays. For that one room he paid forty pounds a year; and there he sat and read law-books and cases, and at intervals looked out upon a blank brick wall. The blank wall seemed to him suggestive of his prospect of success in the business—in both businesses—on which he had come to London. He had as yet seen or heard nothing of Sir William, and he knew not how or where to turn to begin his search. He had called on Ridgeway, and Ridgeway had invited him to dinner at his club. They had dined, and now they smoked—Coverley a cigar, and Ridgeway Egyptian cigarettes; and by chance they talked of Sir William.

"It seems an odd thing to me, Coverley," said Ridgeway, "that you should have given up the Bar and taken to farming."

"It seems an odder thing to me, Ridgeway," answered Coverley, "that I should have given up farming and come back to the Bar."

"Well, why did you give up farming?" asked Ridgeway. "Couldn't make it pay, I suppose?"

"Make it pay? That wasn't the difficulty," said Coverley. "It's a curious story, which appears to me more and more curious the more I think of it; and I *have* thought over it a good deal since I came up to this beastly London again. Three months ago I had an income of six hundred a year apart from farming, I was tenant of two good farms, and was making interesting experiments in farming that promised to be very profitable: to-day I am beginning life, as if I had just waked up from a pleasant dream! I have no farms, no income, and scarcely any prospect! And the sudden and extraordinary change dates exactly from the hour of Sir William Pierrepont's going away!"

"But, Great Scott!—really it's as astonishing as an Adelphi melodrama!" exclaimed Ridgeway.

"'Pon my word, without joking," said Coverley, "it's very much that kind of story. And," continued he, feeling in a friendless and communicative mood, "I'll tell you how it came about."

He then related his loss of his own and the Squire's papers, given to him by Sir William, the cessation of his allowance, and his expulsion from the two farms.

"And all that happened after Sir William went away," commented Ridgeway musingly; "and arose either from his going or from your loss of the papers; and they would not have been lost if he had not given them to you, and he would not have given them to you if he had not been going away: so, as you say, your misfortunes all spring from Sir William's

going away." He then inquired concerning what attempts Coverley had made to recover the papers, and said, producing his pocket-book, "May I take a note or two? I'm frightfully interested in criminal and detective cases, and this is as pretty a case as I have ever known."

But the request, the sight of the note-book, and the recollection that if he related his attempts at the recovery of the lost papers, he would have to tell of his visit to London with the Squire, recalled Coverley to prudence. "No," said he frankly. "You must excuse me at present, Ridgeway. If I told you all, I should have to let out what is a secret,—a secret that doesn't belong to me. But I promise you I'll write for permission to tell you all, for I think you may be able to help me to make a discovery which I must make somehow."

"I'll be delighted, I'm sure," said Ridgeway, shutting up his book. "And I've always seen there was a mystery about this going away of Sir William. I've made a guess," he continued, turning the shining glass of his eye upon Coverley, "and I shall wait with interest to know if I am right."

Coverley wrote to the Squire for permission to tell Ridgeway Sir William's whole story, and by return of post he received it. He then incontinently and hopefully went to Ridgeway,—for that young man had an admirable knack of inspiring with confidence all who knew him,—to relate to him the whole matter. That interview was memorable, for its preliminaries were peculiar and mysterious. Coverley called, as he had done before, at the offices of Beaumont & Co., solicitors, on the south side of Lincoln's Inn Fields, and inquired for Mr. Ridgeway, who was the "Company" in the style and title of the firm, his place and its anonymity having been inherited from his father. Mr. Ridgeway received him in a solemn and stately room, which looked liker the library of

an old mansion than a solicitor's den. Its floor was covered by a rich and noiseless Turkey carpet; its wainscoted walls were adorned with sombre bookcases and old paintings, while its fireplace was an ancient work of art in carved oak, and its ceiling was gaily painted with a Masque of Venus, after the manner of Boucher. As soon as Coverley began to relate the business he had come upon, Ridgeway jumped up, screwed his glass securely in his eye, and seized his box of cigarettes, which he kept always to his hand.

"Wait a minute!" said he hurriedly. "Come this way!"

Coverley followed him, feeling like a client who is being led forth to have the oath administered on an affidavit,—followed downstairs, along passages which seemed to him like those of a rabbit-warren, and so into a small, mean office, with a bare floor, a rusty gas-stove with a steaming dish of water in front of it to keep the air moist, and a seedy, sharp-nosed clerk writing at a table. Ridgeway passed into the inner office, where was a common flat-topped writing-table with a Windsor arm-chair; there were also three small Windsor chairs for clients, and for the rest, oil-cloth on the floor, with a rug before the fire, and framed prints on the walls,—cuttings from illustrated papers of scenes in *causes célèbres*.

"Where are we?" exclaimed Coverley.

"In my other office," said Ridgeway, seating himself, and lighting a cigarette. "Now you can fire away."

"I didn't know you had another office!" said Coverley, not yet done with his astonishment. "And—excuse me—why is it such a contrast to the other office?"

"Oh, of course you don't know," laughed Ridgeway. "I forgot. Well, here I am Ridgeway: up there"—motioning with his thumb over his shoulder—"I am Company. Up there I am a dull, respect-

able solicitor, with an excellent reputation among families of wealth and distinction. I could not stand that, you know: all my liking is for criminal business: it's exciting, and I *must* have excitement. Up there I was like a man longing for whelks and condemned to live on oysters; or with a passion for raw, bad spirits, restricted to drink only Bordeaux and Burgundies of old vintage. So I started this. Do you see where you are? You'll see when you go out. You are in a little, suspicious-looking house in one of the quietest but least reputable streets of all this neighbourhood. Nobody who sees this house ever imagines it has anything to do with Lincoln's Inn Fields, and nobody in our office in the Fields would ever imagine it has anything to do with this street; and I can change up and down from the one to the other without anybody outside knowing. The clients who see Ridgeway here know nothing of Company upstairs, and the clients who happen to see Company upstairs are never likely to know anything of Ridgeway in this mean office. So you see I lead an exciting dual existence. Upstairs I am Jekyll: here I am Hyde." And he fixed his glass in his eye, and looked mischievously at the wondering Coverley, who did not cease to admire the fact that a man should be at such pains to give himself trouble. "Now fire away," said Ridgeway again, "and tell me your story: this is the proper place for hearing it. I suppose I am at liberty to make a note or two?"

"Oh, certainly," said Coverley, and began his statement. He related the whole matter concerning Sir William, and, seeing Ridgeway's quick interest and feeling the stimulus of his apt questions, he did not hesitate even to disclose what he had been wont to consider so humiliating,—his ignorance of his own parentage.

"Well, I was wrong," said Ridgeway in a tone of some disappointment.

"Wrong in what?"

"Wrong in my guess. I guessed Sir William was in a madhouse,—from what the Squire told me."

"Sir William," said Coverley, "is sane enough, I doubt, and will be all the more difficult to find for that reason."

"Yes, probably. But, as I understand, if your lost papers were found, there would be no need to trouble about Sir William."

"No," answered Coverley, "I daresay not—except for his own sake."

"Except for his own sake, perhaps," returned Ridgeway. "And of that, being sane, he must be allowed to be the best judge himself."

"Do you mean," asked Coverley, "that you wouldn't try to find Sir William?"

"No, no; I don't mean that. But let me think the whole thing over. By the way, that man Clare is still to be found about the Variety Theatre, I suppose?"

"I suppose so," answered Coverley.

"Well, dine with me to-morrow evening, and I may have some idea to ventilate."

"Really, Ridgeway," said Coverley, "but I think it's your turn to dine with me."

"Nonsense!" said the other. "You're a briefless barrister; and I'm grateful to you for bringing me your business. I'll hand you a big bill when the whole thing is cleared up, and you come into your own."

"Come into my own?" mused Coverley, as he left the strange office and went out into the street. To make sure of the identity of the place when he should seek it again, he looked about him. He saw over against him King's College Hospital, and the unassuming doorway from which he had issued bore among other names on its cheek, "Ridgeway, Soli-

citor." So the strange story Ridgeway had told him concerning his dual existence was fact.

Next evening he dined with Ridgeway again, and earnestly inquired of him if he had any notion how to proceed for the discovery of Sir William; "for," said he, "I have not."

"I have no notion for that yet," said Ridgeway; "but I'll get one: I'm never hopeless. Meantime, my clerk—my *criminal* clerk, I mean—a clever dog—has made the acquaintance of the actor Clare."

"By standing him a drink, I suppose?" Ridgeway nodded: words were unnecessary. "But," continued Coverley, "I don't quite see the object?"

"I'm at present prepossessed with the idea of learning something about those lost papers," answered Ridgeway. "By the way, are you going down to your farm soon?"

"On Saturday," answered Coverley.

"Will it be convenient for you to take me with you?" asked Ridgeway. "I am very easy to accommodate, I assure you."

"I shall be delighted if you will come," said Coverley. "And so will the Squire, I'm sure. We can freely talk the matter over with him."

"Yes," answered Ridgeway, emphasising somewhat his deliberate drawl. "I want chiefly to have a look round."

CHAPTER XXV

A WONDERFUL EYE

MR. RIDGEWAY had brought his acute and active faculty of suspicion to bear upon the mystery of the loss of Coverley's papers, and he had at length narrowed the range of his suspicion to a single person—John Evelegh. If it be asked, Why was he the first to suspect the right person? let it be remembered that he was the first who had heard from Coverley every incident and circumstance connected with the loss; to him alone (for one confesses to a lawyer as to a doctor) had Coverley related with absolute fulness and accuracy his visit to Jenny Evelegh, and his scene with her father. And if it be furthermore demanded why Coverley himself had not suspected Evelegh, let it be considered that, apart from the probability that he was not so acute in suspicion as Ridgeway, he had prepossessions concerning Evelegh's honesty and honour which Ridgeway could not have; Ridgeway had never seen Evelegh, nor knew aught of him except what Coverley had let drop concerning his astonishing antipathy to himself.

He had first turned his suspicious eye on Clare, who, on the showing of Coverley's story, was the only other person liable to suspicion, and had found him by report unworthy of his regard;—the long-nosed clerk had declared there was "nothing in that actor fellow! nothing but a voice;" and Ridgeway had therefore taken, for the present at least, his suspicious

eye off the *vox et præterea nihil*, and went with Coverley to East Dormus to bring it to bear upon John Evelegh, late of Brockham.

He said nothing to Coverley of his suspicion, or of his purpose in accompanying him into the country; but on the Sunday morning he went out after breakfast with his host to look at the pigs, and to consider the prospect of the crops, and chiefly to discover the situation of the Home Farm. After luncheon he saw Coverley was restless, and, guessing that he was bent on going out to meet Jenny Evelegh, he pretended that he wished to have a nap; and then, when Coverley had shot off like an arrow from a bow, he rose and followed in more leisurely fashion the way to the Home Farm. He avoided screened or sheltered or bosky places, lest he should disturb a pair of lovers, and arrived anon at the house of the Home Farm. A fierce and shaggy sheep-dog dashed out upon him, barking, tumbling over himself in his vivacity of suspicion. Ridgeway kept him off by pointing his stick like a fencer, and a stout woman came and stood in the doorway and shouted to the dog to "lie down." The dog obeyed, and Ridgeway advanced.

"Does Mr. John Evelegh live here?" he asked.

"He doos," answered the woman.

"Is he in?" asked Ridgeway.

"He is," answered the woman.

"Can I see him?" asked Ridgeway.

"I cunnot say," answered Mrs. Sumner; but she did not stir, she was fascinated by the young lawyer's eyeglass. For she declared afterwards to Evelegh, "I could not anyhow keep my sight off the shining winder he looked through wi' one eye! I kept wondering what it was for, and I thought, Good gracious mussy! what is fashions comin' to when a young gentleman 'll glaze his eye like a picter to keep it from the dust! For spectacles to read small

print wi' is one thing, but one round winder like a bull's eye is another!"

"Will you be so good as ask him if I can see him?" said Ridgeway.

That brought Mrs. Sumner to herself, and she turned and went in. She opened the parlour door.

"John," said she, "here's a gentleman wants to see you. Will you walk in, sir?"

Ridgeway entered, and John Evelegh raised his spectacled eyes from the family Bible in which he was reading.

"I fear I am intruding, Mr. Evelegh," said Ridgeway. "But I was passing this way, and I thought I should like to look in upon you. I am going on to the Squire's. My name is Ridgeway; I am Squire Pierrepont's London lawyer."

"Any friend of Squire Perpont," said Evelegh, taking off his spectacles and rising, "is welcome to me. The Squire is my best friend—though he hev took up lately wi' mad notions o' farming. But sit down, sir."

"I have heard a good deal about you, Mr. Evelegh," said Ridgeway, sitting down. "You are a kind of champion of the old ways of farming."

"Well, champion!" said Evelegh, with an indulgent smile; for to most people except Coverley he was rather a sad and forbearing, than a morose and truculent person. "I don't know about that."

"Perhaps martyr would be the better name," said Ridgeway recklessly.

"That might be nearer it," conceded Evelegh carelessly, for (like his stout female relative) he was becoming fascinated by Ridgeway's bull's-eye window, which so caught and flashed the light that he could see nothing but it on the man's face; indeed, from that first moment of fascination Evelegh never knew quite what Ridgeway looked like. "Yes, sir, that *might* be nearer it, though I don't say it's it, you

understand. But I *hev* lost a fine freehold farm that's been in my family for 'undreds o' years—centuries, as I may say; and they *do* say, some on 'em," he added, with a pathetic doubt hanging unresolved in his voice, "that I lost it through my old-fashioned farming, they do say, I believe, *bad* farming. But this is a queer world, sir, and it's over hard for some folks to tackle."

"As dog Towzer said when he tried to worry the grindstone."

Evelegh kept his fascinated eye on the bull's-eye window of Ridgeway; he heard his calm, suave, deliberate voice say something which by its tone should have been serious and edifying. But he considered the words, and suddenly it flashed on him that they conveyed a joke, and then he laughed a hoarse, rusty, unused laugh,—"Ha! Ha, ha, ha!" And thereafter for a little while he could not make up his mind whether to regard his visitor as a serious or a jocular person.

But Ridgeway talked to him of agricultural depression and the low price of wheat, of unoccupied farms and deserted villages, and Evelegh's impression of his jocularity wore off. Then, circling nearer and nearer his subject, he at length touched its centre.

"A neighbour of yours," said he, "seems to have been rather harshly treated by his landlord."

"Anan?" said Evelegh, failing to comprehend.

"I mean," said Ridgeway, "your neighbour, Mr. Coverley."

Instantly Evelegh's eye, which had been until then mild, wondering, and ox-like, became hard and vicious like that of a horse with an evil temper. "I don't know," said he, "as how Coverley needs to be pitied by any man. He has money of his own, as I understand, and he's gone away quite spry to be a lawyer like your own self, Mr. Ridgeland."

"Oh," said Ridgeway, and his "window" flashed and sparkled in Evelegh's gaze, "he'll be a greater lawyer than I can ever be. He's a barrister, you know, and I am only a solicitor; he pleads in the High Courts before judges in a wig and gown, and I mustn't."

"Ey? Is that so?" exclaimed Evelegh, with a grudge in his look, as if he thought that Coverley, after all, had rather been benefited by his action than damaged. His grudge was appeased, however, by what Ridgeway next said.

"You are quite wrong, however, in thinking he has money. He *had* money, but he hasn't had a penny since those papers of his were lost. You've heard, of course, of his losing valuable papers in a mysterious fashion?"

"Ay, I've heard," said Evelegh, but he heard as though he heard not. He looked dazed, stupefied, wondering.

Ridgeway triumphed inwardly, for he declared to himself, "I'm sure he knows of those papers! I'm right!"

"It is very curious," he went on in his calm, suave, deliberate tone, "that they have never been found; and yet they could only have been lost in two ways. Either they were taken from him by a man he travelled with, or"—Evelegh's gaze had slowly returned to Ridgeway, whose eye now held him fixed—"he lost them in a house he called at that night." Evelegh could not withdraw his gaze from the eye, which burned upon him like the disc of a lantern. His hands grasped tightly the arms of his chair, and his tongue clove to his mouth. He was either too simply straightforward or too paralysed to say, "The man must have taken them"; and still the eye held him subject, and seemed to search into his soul. A kind of pity made Ridgeway add, "What house it was Mr. Coverley has never told."

Then Evelegh tore his gaze away from the searching eye, and with a whimper of relief he clasped his hands in his lap and looked blankly at the open page of his Bible. He felt he was as yet undiscovered, but he was perplexed and shaken through and through by what this strange young man had told him. Slowly it dawned on him to say, "Coverley is a friend of yourn, belike?"

"He is."

"And you're going on to Squire's?"

"Yes," said Ridgeway, "I'm going on to the Squire's; but I am staying with Mr. Coverley. We have come down together over Sunday."

"Oh, that's it?" said Evelegh, still attracted by that marvellous eye, but compelling his gaze to remain away from it. "Well, sir, I'll not be keeping you any longer from good company. Good afternoon."

Released from the surveillance of the eye which so imposed on his imagination, Evelegh's loose thoughts ranged freely over the whole business of his theft. His deed had slipped away from him, as will a floating chip on the most sluggish stream from a man sitting on the bank; it had become like a memory of his childhood, and yet here it was again before him like an event of yesterday. It had been, he had conceived, disposed of, like all things done that cannot be undone or revised; it was dead and buried in that hidden drawer in the oak secretary; and if now and again his mind had reverted to it with a sharp pang as an act unworthy, perhaps, and somewhat to be regretted, it had not till now risen up and clamoured like a bell to the whole world. From what the young lawyer had said, it needed but that Coverley should say at whose house he had spent a little while on that fatal evening, for him—him! John Evelegh!—to be suspected, taken, accused, found out, and disgraced! He felt himself near the edge of a precipice at the foot of which is the fatal sea submerging and

destroying all, and his whole being was shaken by the possibility of toppling over! It caused him as deadly a throe as the thought of death itself! To lose his character! to be pointed at! He dared not pursue the inspection of results.

He turned his head as if away from his imaginings, —and there stood his daughter. Had Coverley ever breathed a suspicion to her that her father might have taken his papers? No, that was impossible! Yet to be resolved on the matter had a fatal attraction for him.

"Just hed a visitor, I've hed, my gell," said he, fitting the tips of his fingers together and bending his eyes on the open Bible. "A nice lawyer gentleman, wi' a bull's-eye glass on's eye; he's stayin' wi' Coverley and goin' on to the Squire's. Tells me noos about them papers Coverley lost. 'T appears he lost all his money through lossin' them; ever hear ought o' that, my gell?"

"Yes, father," answered Jenny, with a blush, and she let gush forth all the strange news which she had had to bottle up for more than a week. "He has lost all his money! He has not a penny now, poor fellow! And that's why he has got to go away to earn money at the lawyering he learned before he took to farming. Sir William had his money, and the papers Mr. Coverley lost were all about it and the two farms, and Mr. Philip—like a bad man!—has taken advantage of his losing them to take everything from him. I don't understand it, but that's how it is! And that's not all! There were valuable papers of the Squire's with them that were lost, and that's why the Squire has become so poor, and has had to take to farming, poor dear, brave gentleman! If anybody has *found* the papers, how can he be so wicked as to keep them?—unless he is so stupid and ignorant that he does not know their value! Why, what's the matter, father?"

His hands had fallen limp in his lap, his jaw had dropped, and his brown, patient, ox eyes were turned on her, instinct with something like terror.

"The Squire!" he exclaimed. "Dear, dearie me! Oh dear, dearie me!" His eyes slowly wandered from her to the oak secretary in whose carved recess the papers were buried.

"Yes," said his daughter. "It's very dreadful about the Squire, too."

"Ay, gell, it's dreadful! It's very dreadful! It's what you may say 'overwhelmin''!" And his gaze roved round without finding rest, and his hands fumbled and picked at the arms of his chair. "You're sure, certain sure of it?" he asked suddenly.

"Quite sure," she answered. "Mr. Coverley told me himself before he went away;" and again she blushed. "And one of his reasons for going is to find Sir William, to bring him back to put things right for the Squire, and for himself, too, perhaps."

His gaze lingered on his daughter; he had disengaged attention enough, but no more, to note that she had disobeyed him in holding communication with Coverley, but he said nothing of that.

"Ay!" said he; "to put things right! Things need a dale o' putting right. That they do!" And he rose and went out.

His dog met him, wagging his tail, and he stooped and gave him an unusual caress, which drove the creature frantic with delight. He wandered on to the pigstye; the pigs came grunting and put up their snouts for food, and he leaned over and scratched their bristly heads. He felt it was surprisingly kind and friendly in any living thing to take notice of him and to trust him; something seemed to snap in his head, and he wept a few bitter, hard-wrung tears. He tried to think steadily and progressively of what he had done, and why he had done it, but it was like

climbing up a bank of sand; for all his toil of thought he remained where he was, smitten with horror and remorse by the revelation that in striking at him whom he had thought his enemy, he had ruined his best friend.

"I'm a bad old feller!" he kept saying over and over to himself. "To think—to think that I done it to the Squire! Gawmous idiot! No more sense than a magpie."

Whatever injury he might have done to Coverley, and the danger of discovery to which he had been so alive but a few minutes ago, were forgotten in his poignant sense of the loss and trouble he had caused the Squire. But for all his erring John Evelegh was made of stern, honest stuff. Now that his better feelings were deeply stirred, his one thought was to make amends—to make restitution to the Squire, and restitution to the Squire made necessary, in his view, restitution to Coverley also, though that was but a dull thought compared to the other.

That day was Sunday—the sacred day. "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy," he murmured to himself, with a sad shake of the head over the terrible lapse from holiness of the past hour. It was Sunday, and therefore he would let the matter rest—he would not even look at the papers that had caused him to sin—until the morning.

Next morning, after a strangely troubled night, he went into the parlour, and opened the secretary to get the papers. He sprung open the secret recess—*but there were no papers there!*

CHAPTER XXVI

BAFFLED

MEANWHILE, the solicitor, unconscious of the effect of his wonderful eye, had gone his triumphant way to the Squire's, to conduct some private talk with him before Coverley appeared. The Squire's household was now very much abridged; not half the Hall was occupied. The only servants, indoor and out, were a maid-servant and the crabbed Timmins, who had refused to accept his dismissal. Miss Pierrepont managed the cooking with her own fair and affectionate hands, while Dorothy was a kind of parlour-maid; and the Squire himself attended to his farming and gardening. The Squire still retained his den, or "study," and thither he took Ridgeway upon his intimating that he desired to speak with him alone.

"Where's Coverley, then?" asked the Squire. "Given you the slip?"

"I think," said Ridgeway, with his suave deliberation, "the fact must be that I have given him the slip. He left me apparently napping, and went, I presume, to a rendezvous with his sweetheart; and I instantly arose and girded up my loins to pay a clandestine visit to the young lady's father."

"Oh!" queried the Squire in quick curiosity. "Clandestine? Why clandestine?"

"I mean," said Ridgeway, "clandestine as regards Mr. Coverley. I had a purpose in calling on Mr. Evelegh which I haven't communicated to Mr.

Coverley; but I should like to state it to you, Mr. Pierrepont. Indeed, you are concerned in my purpose quite as much as Mr. Coverley."

"Oh! Well?" said the Squire, bending his brows in attention.

"I want to find those papers of yours and his own which Coverley lost. May I ask if you, Mr. Pierrepont, have fully faced the question all round where and how those papers were lost?"

"Well," said the Squire, scratching his cheek, "it has always, I must say, been a mystery to me. Coverley suspected that man Clare, but there seemed no real ground for that suspicion when it was put to the test. Then we advertised—or, at least, Philip did—and, to tell you the truth, I have sometimes fancied the papers had come that way into Philip's hands, and he has kept them back."

Ridgeway took his glass from his eye, polished it deliberately with his silk handkerchief, smiled faintly, and shook his head.

"Has it never occurred to you," he said, "to suspect John Evelegh of having taken them?"

"What! John Evelegh?" cried the Squire, sitting up. "Why on earth, Mr. Ridgeway, should I or anyone have suspected John Evelegh?"

"Ah, I forgot," said Ridgeway. "You probably have not heard of Coverley's visit that evening to Evelegh's house, and of a scene he had with him?"

"No," answered the Squire; "I have *not* heard of that. But still I would no more suspect John Evelegh than myself!"

"Well," said Ridgeway, "since Mr. Coverley himself has not told you that story, I don't think I should tell you. But this much I must mention;"—and he gathered interest and quickness of accent as he proceeded;—"Mr. Coverley had a scene with Evelegh, and went out, forgetting his overcoat; after a few minutes—I beg you will mark—he remembered his

coat, got it out, walked away, and rode home, thinking nothing of his papers till he reached home, when they were not to be found. I beg you will mark, Mr. Pierrepont, that the papers had been in the inner pocket of that coat presumably when Mr. Coverley entered Evelegh's house; why should not Evelegh have taken them? They may have slipped from the pocket lying over the back of a chair: he saw them; he thought, 'Here's a chance of playing a trick on that young man!'—you know, of course, he had cultivated a strong dislike of Mr. Coverley;—he took them, and he hadn't time to think twice before the coat was taken away."

"Does Coverley think that?" demanded the Squire grimly.

"No," answered Ridgeway; "it surprises me it has never occurred to him. It is my own suspicion, which I have not mentioned yet to him. How does it strike you?"

"If it were not," said the Squire with some heat, "that you have never known John Evelegh, and that you are a kind of professional suspicion-monger, Mr. Ridgeway, I would call it the most disgraceful and dishonourable suggestion I have ever heard!" Ridgeway flushed a little, and again took his glass from his eye to polish it. "I believe, Mr. Ridgeway," continued the Squire, and a grim smile flickered about his mouth, "you are capable of suspecting your senior partner, the eminently respectable Mr. Beaumont, of felony or forgery or bigamy!"

"I am capable, Mr. Pierrepont," said Ridgeway, "of suspecting the Archbishop of Canterbury of infidelity; I am capable of suspecting any man of anything; I am prepared to consider any evidence without prepossession or prejudice. Surely that is being judicial!"

"Then I thank God I am not judicial, though I am a justice of the peace!" exclaimed the Squire.

"I think it is not expected of you, Mr. Pierrepont," said Ridgeway.

"There are such things as primary probabilities," said the Squire, disregarding the young solicitor's mild sarcasm. "If jam was stolen from a cupboard, and the cat was accused of stealing it, would you sit down to take evidence against the cat? No; you'd refuse to hear it. Why? Because cats don't eat jam! And farmers like Evelegh don't steal papers!"

"You think it absurd and impossible?"

"Quite. I excuse you, Mr. Ridgeway, because you have not known John Evelegh for years, as I have: you evidently don't know the kind of man at all. He is a variety of breed you don't meet in London or about law-courts; he is as simple as a child, and as slow and patient as an ox."

"How do you account, then, for his extreme dislike of Mr. Coverley?" asked Ridgeway.

"Even an ox, I suppose," answered the Squire, "may dislike a boy that has goaded him badly."

"Well, Mr. Pierrepont," said the lawyer, "I'll say no more. Perhaps I am mistaken. I had hoped you would help me to bring Mr. Evelegh to book; but with your views, of course, you can't."

"I won't," said the Squire. "Take my advice, and leave Evelegh alone; and leave the papers alone. Their loss is a mystery,—a providential mystery, it seems to me, considering the exact moment it happened; and, like other providential mysteries, it will be best left to explain itself, when it is ripe for explanation."

"There is another thing I wanted to mention: I wonder if you will think me as mistaken in that?" said Ridgeway. "Sir William, as I understand, had a son who would just be about Mr. Coverley's age: taking all we know into consideration, do you think it likely that Mr. Coverley is that son?"

"Oh, you are there with me, are you?" said the Squire. "Well, to tell you the truth at once, I do think it very likely. What then?"

"Wouldn't it go far to explain Mr. Philip Pierrepont's treatment of him, supposing he knew it, or suspected it?"

"No doubt it would," answered the Squire. "And I am pretty sure Philip does know it. Still I ask you, What then? You don't propose to tell Coverley your suspicion?"

"Well, I wished to ask your opinion of the propriety of doing that."

"My opinion is, Leave it alone. Leave that alone, and the question of the lost papers alone, and find Sir William: these things will settle themselves when he is found. There's a ring at the door bell; I daresay it is Coverley. My last word, Ridgeway, is, *Find Sir William;* he can't be so difficult to find as a needle in a pottle of hay, and even if he were, your cleverness should be equal to the task; so find him. Here's Coverley."

The result of that conversation was that Ridgeway returned to London with his mind bent on the discovery of Sir William. The Squire's unhesitating opinion of Evelegh's innocence had shaken the young lawyer's own conviction of his guilt, and the Squire's authority had overborne his intention of pursuing the investigation and bringing pressure upon the farmer. In considering ways and means to effect the discovery, he thought that some hint for a beginning might be got from an interview with Sir William's wife, the actress, Mrs. Stonebridge. After deliberating on that, he wrote to the Squire, asking if there was any objection to letting the lady know —if anything seemed likely to be gained by it— that he believed he knew her son.

"I think," wrote the Squire in reply, "you had better say nothing of her son. My brother has kept

him from her for nearly five-and-twenty years, with good reason, I have no doubt; and it must be left to him to say 'Yea' or 'Nay' when he is found. Besides," added the Squire prudently, "we may be mistaken in our identification."

"He hampers my inquiry terribly," said Ridgeway to himself. "And, by Jove! I've a great mind to do just what I think proper."

He, at least, sought and was granted an interview with the actress. It was arranged with Clare by the long-nosed clerk, who told the actor that his master, by a singular chance, had received certain communications which must interest and might benefit Mrs. Stonebridge. Accordingly, one morning Sir William's wife was led by her brother of the blank countenance, not into the splendid chambers in Lincoln's Inn Fields, but into the somewhat mean and shady office in Portugal Street; and Ridgeway was summoned by the long-nosed clerk from his Olympian abode.

Ridgeway came with his glass in his eye and his box of cigarettes in his hand, and regarded with some curiosity the lady who had been the cause of so much movement and mystery and bother. In the plain light of day, without the paint and her theatrical trappings, she did not look so well as we have seen her. She had a handsome figure and fine eyes, but such a complexion, coarse in texture and dirty of colour, as the regular and lavish use of paint and powder produces. She entered upon the business herself, while her brother sat by, looking as observant and full of matter, but as uncommunicative also, as a toad.

"I understand, Mr. Ridgeway," said she, and she made play with her eyes upon the elegant young solicitor, "that you have something to say to me, and I have come express to hear it. Now tell me at once, like a good man, if it has anything to do with that brute of a husband of mine?"

"It has something to do with him, Lady Pierrepont," answered Ridgeway.

"Law!" exclaimed the lady,—"and that sounds like a pun said to you!—but how do you know that's my name?"

"It is a lawyer's business," said Ridgeway, "to know a great many things that people don't guess they know; and Lady Pierrepont's wrongs," he added, "may be better known than she thinks."

"Oh, go along, you insulting man!" cried the pleased lady. "How can that be? For I'm sure I never name them, except to a friend or two."

"More than that, Lady Pierrepont," said the suave young man, "certain things have come to my knowledge which almost nobody but myself has guessed."

"Oh, what are they?" she asked.

"You must excuse me, Lady Pierrepont," said he, "if I don't tell you what they are just yet."

"Oh, you won't tell me; not if you know it, eh?" And she laughed.

"I would like to help you to gain your case with your husband," said he.

"You would?" she cried, slapping the table. "You're the man for me!"

Thereupon the toad's eye winked, and a voice came from the blank countenance. "Hadn't we better first consider the question of fees?"

"The question of fees," said Ridgeway deliberately, "need not trouble you. It is a lawyer's business, when he conducts a case to a successful conclusion, to get his fees out of the other side."

"Quite right," said the lady; and the toad's eye winked assent.

"But before I can do anything to help you," said Ridgeway, "I must find Sir William."

"Well! Did ever you hear anything like that?" exclaimed the lady, turning to her brother. "First came the other Stoney—months ago—'I want to

find Sir William: where is he?' Then the other day came the old maid, his cousin—'I *must* find Sir William; where is he?' And now there's you," she declared, turning to Ridgeway. "You want his address, too, perhaps? And perhaps you're acting for her!" she cried, with a sudden burst of suspicion.

"For *her*? Who is *her*, Lady Pierrepont?" asked the young man.

"Miss Philippa Pierrepont!"

"Don't know her," said Ridgeway. "Never heard of her. But I *do* want Sir William's address; any address, or hint of an address, through which I can get at him: I can't do anything till then."

"Well, upon my word!" exclaimed the lady. "It's like Mrs. Thingumy's cookery receipt: 'Take a fine hare!' But 'first catch your hare.'"

"Certainly," said Ridgeway. "And I'll catch my hare if you can give me the merest hint to go upon: *Poste Restante, Boulogne;* or *Faulkner's, Moorgate Street Station;* or anything of the kind."

"I can give you neither hint nor suggestion nor idea!" declared the lady, in a rapid rush of speech. "I know nothing about him! I only know this, that if I don't hear from him in a way that shall satisfy me by the twenty-fifth of March, he and his shall suffer for it!—and he knows it too!"

Ridgeway asked her the meaning of that threat, and she gave him the explanation which she had given a few days before to Miss Philippa Pierrepont. He noted it, and laid it up in his mind for an expectation that Sir William would certainly be heard of somehow before the twenty-fifth of March. He questioned her further, this way and that, and finally concluded that she knew no more than she had said. Then, assuring her again that he had knowledge which would help her to gain her end if Sir William could be communicated with, and begging her to let him

know if she got any clue to his whereabouts before the fatal day, he dismissed her.

Then began a period in which Coverley's imagination of the blank wall outside his "chambers" window was fully realised: nowhere could a door, or window, or even a loophole be found for the discovery of Sir William, or for a glimpse beyond the mystery that oppressed the lives of both Coverley and the Squire. Once Coverley thought he saw Sir William on the opposite platform of an underground station; but a train came between, and when it passed the platform was bare; and once Adela fancied she had seen him sitting at a concert in St. James's Hall,—which was not unlikely, for Sir William had been very fond of music. But beyond these doubtful and unproductive visions there was nothing.

Coverley's life in "chambers" was literally so cabined, cribbed, confined, so bereft of air and colour, that, at the end of the week, he seemed to himself to gasp for relief like a fish out of water. Then he would send a hurried telegram to Adela, and they would meet at the station to go down to East Dormus together for Sunday. One of these jaunts in particular had an issue which must be noted.

CHAPTER XXVII

AN INCIDENT TO BE REGRETTED

WHEN they arrived at East Dormus there was not, as there usually had been on such occasions, a dogcart from the Hall to meet them: Coverley's telegram to the Squire could not have been delivered. They were compelled, therefore, to walk together to the Pierrepont Arms to hire a vehicle. While they waited in the yard for the trap and the horse to be brought together and attached to each other, they were surprised by the appearance of Philip. He issued from the yard door of the hotel. It was Saturday afternoon, and having no more business to transact, he apparently had indulged a good deal in the lighter part of lunch. Both Coverley and Adela, who were fasting, were somewhat embarrassed by the encounter; but Philip, being in the condition of the sons of Belial of whom Milton speaks, greeted them with more than self-possession. He first addressed himself to Adela.

"Ah, Adey," said he, "is that you? How goes the London adventure. I've heard all about it,—the tenors, the basses, and the Signor Twangadillos. Are they very well?"

Adela was stung with offence. "Really, Philip," said she in her spirited way, "I think you are very insolent. If I were a man"— She broke off.

"Come, sir," said Coverley, whose slow wrath had already risen, but who, until Adela had spoken, was uncertain what lengths of familiarity she had allowed

to Philip, "you had better pass on in your present condition, and leave us to get into our trap."

"Your trap, sir?" said Philip. "Trap is a good word. For all your trying, you haven't been able to get that mole, Sir William, into your traps yet. No; the old boy keeps very tight to his burrow. No; your prospects are in a bad way, my gentleman-farmer,—who is nameless, and shall be."

"Hold your tongue, sir," said Coverley, "or you will regret it!"

"Regret what, you rascal?" exclaimed Philip, ruffling himself like a cock, and becoming harder and fiercer in his utterance. "Do you think you are protected from free speech because you happen to be promoted to the company of a lady? I have many things to say unto you, as the apostle says. Who helped you to invent that cock-and-bull story about losing the papers? Papers! You know what they were!"

"Will you go away?" said Coverley, almost speechless now with rage.

"Certainly not!" exclaimed Philip.

In a twinkling Coverley had him by the collar, and his cane in his hand. He poised the cane a second, quivering, ready to thrash him; but he controlled himself. He ran Philip into the stable and locked the door, and then he broke the cane across and across, and flung the pieces on the dung-heap. That done, he said "Ready" to the waiting groom, and helped Adela into her seat.

"You mustn't mind him, sir," said the man, with a wink. "He's oftens like that now. His sweetheart don't agree with him, some on us thinks,—rises on him like."

Without a word Coverley jumped up into his place, the man let go the horse's head, and they drove away.

Coverley and Adela were well out of the town before the agitation of either had sunk sufficiently to

permit the easement of speech. They were alone in the dogcart. Coverley had arranged to send it back by one of his men, who would be going into town for his Saturday's shopping. At the first ascent from the town, Coverley slowed down to walking pace, and then Adela spoke.

"I'm afraid," said she humbly, "that I was the cause of the scene. If I had said nothing, he might have gone away without more ado, after he had spoken to me."

"You did quite right," said Coverley, "to rebuke him as you did. I always suspected him of vulgarity and coarseness, in spite of all his manner of refinement. I would have interfered at first if I had not thought that perhaps—well, that perhaps you had in the past allowed him some—some familiarities of speech. You don't mind my saying that, I hope?"

"No," she answered, blushing quite openly; "and I'm sorry I did allow him them." There was a pause; the top of the ascent was reached, and Coverley flicked his horse with the whip. At the next acclivity the horse again assumed walking pace, and the talk was resumed. "Didn't you," said she, giving him a glance of frank admiration, "run him off? It did look so funny!" and she laughed. "I had no idea you were so much stronger than he."

"Oh," he answered, "it wasn't that. It was the way I had got him, and the suddenness: that was all. I daresay Philip is as strong as I."

"I don't believe he can be," said she. And again the horse resumed his rapid pace.

As they neared Pierrepont Hall, Coverley became alarmed by his companion. Her breath rose in whistling flutters, and suddenly sank as with a sigh. Low moans came from her, and finally she burst into tears, and leaned helplessly towards Coverley,—so helplessly that he had to put his arm about her to keep her from swaying over and falling. He was

exceedingly alarmed for a little, and then he seemed to himself to make a discovery.

"I believe," he said to himself, "it's what they call hysterics."

Now, having no experience whatever of hysterics, he thought that the best way of composing her would be to talk comfortingly and soothingly, which he forthwith proceeded to do.

"Come, come," said he, "you mustn't give way like this! I'm sure it's very unlike you." But the more he talked soothingly, the more she wept and laughed by turns, till he was almost compelled to laugh himself, out of sheer contagion; and the more she clung to him, which I imagine he did not in the least mind. "There, there now," he continued. "Try to compose yourself and be quiet, like a good girl. What will they think if they see us driving up to the Hall like this? They'll think," he said suddenly, with a laugh, "we are making love to each other."

That had the effect of stringing her up a little, and with a strong effort she began to master her emotion.

But the particular mischief had been done: they *had* been thought to be making love to each other,—by a woman who hung a little way off, first in the open, and then gazing with all her eyes over the top of a hedge. The sight was too much for her. She finally put her hands before her burning eyes and sank on the grass with wild cries and sobs and tears. It was poor Jenny Evelegh, and the demon of jealousy had taken full possession of her, and was tearing her.

Coverley returned to town without having been able to see Jenny as he had been wont, and, ignorant that she had seen anything to disquiet her, he resumed his usual round of life on the Monday,—a life which was becoming more and more harassed and desperate. He worked hard at his law-books and in the Courts; but his toil was unproductive, except of a few guineas as his small share of what barristers call "soup" at

the Old Bailey or Quarter Sessions; his other appearances in wig and gown being only as a "devil" for his leader, Mr. Marmaduke Flynn,—that is to say, he pled in place of the Irishman in certain cases, for which the Irishman pocketed the fees. Finally, he saw the small purse of money with which he had come to London dwindle away in spite of all his economies, and he would sit alone in his room at night, with fear at his heart, and stare at the spectre of want which was steadily and stealthily approaching him. He was too proud to make known his need even to Ridgeway, and he was not versatile enough to attempt to make a living by writing, as many young and briefless barristers do in like circumstances. At length the heavy hand of Fate smote him, worried, hard-worked, and half-starved as he was, and he fell ill. Early one raw February morning he woke with his head aching as if it would burst, a chill shuddering as of ebbing life in his back, and joints that refused to perform their office. He considered himself half-deliriously, as from afar off.

"I believe," said he, "I am going to have some kind of fever!"

The thought was maddening and appalling in that place. It was Saturday morning; he had intended to go into the country, and no one—not even the laundress or charwoman—might enter the chambers until Monday morning! He lay and wondered what he would do, and his mind drifted about in waves of horror, delirium, and sickness: whirling in the eddy of the consciousness of his present need, or floating away on the current of memory of his sweetheart Jenny, of the Squire, of Sir William, and of all the changes and misfortunes his disappearance had caused.

He was parched with thirst. He drank from his water-bottle; but his thirst was not assuaged, and the cold water made him shiver as with an ague. He

dragged upon him all the clothing he could reach, strove to control his aguish rigours, and waited for daylight. He lost consciousness, or slept, and woke burning hot, with the rat-tat of the postman in his ears. Moved by habit, and giving himself no time to think of sickness, he threw himself from bed to see what the postman had dropped into the letter-box. He reached the door he scarcely knew how, staggering and reeling, and found a letter for himself. He felt his consciousness slipping from him; but he held to it grimly till he had torn open the letter, and read the following words from the Squire:—"I suppose you are coming down to-morrow. Don't fail. A most extraordinary thing has come to my ears to-day, in which poor Evelegh is concerned. Come down as soon as you can."

He read that, and fell upon the floor, and knew no more.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE MYSTERY OF THE MUDDY SHOES

WHEN John Evelegh could find no such packets of papers as he sought, neither in the secret recess nor in any drawer of the oak secretary, he stood dumfounded, like a man who expects to enter an open door and finds it suddenly and swiftly shut in his face. His understanding failed him. He stared at the open drawers and the gaping recess; plunged his hand into them again, one after another, as if he must have passed them in his first search; stared away at the window, and back again at the drawers and the recess. He sat down to try to consider. He had with his own hand dropped the packet of papers into that recess; the recess was now empty. He had not opened it since first he had closed it upon the papers, nor did anyone know of its existence but himself. How had the papers gone? where had they gone? who had taken them? No answer could he find to these questions, and again he stared at the open recess, again he thrust in his hand, again he looked in the several drawers.

He sat thus so long without attaining any conclusion that his daughter came knocking at the door.

"Have you gone to sleep, father?" she said. "The Squire has been waiting for you about half an hour."

Then he rose and unlocked the door, and went out to attend the Squire. The Squire looked at him narrowly, remembering Ridgeway's visit to him the day before.

"You don't look well this morning, Evelegh," said he. "A thick head again, eh? Thick head means bad liver. I'll give you a dose or two of my medicine, which — thank God!—I haven't used since I took to working for my living."

A spasm, as of pain, passed upon Evelegh's face and form. "Thank you kindly, Squire," said he. "But Epsom and senna's the drugs for my money."

"It's a mistake, Evelegh," pursued the simple Squire. "They only touch the stomach; and I should think you need more than the stomach touched."

"That I do, Squire," said Evelegh sadly; and he might have quoted—had he known it—Shakespeare's saying concerning "poppy and mandragora."

"Well," said the Squire, "you come over this evening, and I'll give you something.—By the way, you had a visitor yesterday afternoon: what did you think of him?"

"A nice, clever, civil-spoken gentleman," said Evelegh.

"Yes," said the Squire, "he's a clever fellow, I think."

So they set about the farm duties; and all the day the Squire noted that Evelegh was strangely distraught, and strangely and newly humble and amenable; he uttered no objection to "new-fangled farming," and poured no contempt upon bulbs and tubers.

When it was dark, and his day's work was done, his daughter brought him his house shoes. She stood still, inspecting them.

"Did you go out in these shoes yesterday, father?" she asked.

"Nay, my gell," he answered. "I never go out in them."

"Well, look at them: they're all over muck!"

"Ay," said Evelegh, "so they be!" And he stared contemplatively on them, "Now, however can that

there hev come on them? Sure-lie, Betsy must hev been a-wearin' of them!"

But Mrs. Sumner, when accused, indignantly declared that the shoes were big enough to drop off her feet, even if lined with all the straw in the barn-yard. So the dirt on the shoes remained a mystery; it was brushed off, and presently it was forgotten.

Evelegh had intended to make full confession and restitution to the Squire; but when the papers could not be found, restitution would not be made, and without that, what was the use of confession? Confession might as well be—must be—postponed until restitution could be made; for it could not be but the papers must turn up some time or other. Meanwhile, the sight of the Squire working as hard as, or harder than, himself was a continual reproach to him; and he now began even to pity Coverley, who had lost his money and been banished to London through his action. He became the victim of an awakened conscience. His cheek began to lose its ruddy colour, which hitherto had seemed so ingrained that no grief or worry or passion could wear it out; his hair became greyer; his body began to bow and his eye to have the dull, glazed look of sleeplessness,—and yet, when questioned, he declared he did not know but that he slept well enough. Moreover, he developed a cough and twinges of rheumatism, which, with his changing appearance, caused his household and the Squire's grave anxiety.

"Poor old Evelegh's breaking up, I'm afraid," said the Squire at home. "His worries have begun to tell on him at last. Well, well; I see it's more worry than work that kills a man."

And then uprose again the mystery of the muddy shoes. On another Monday evening, when Jenny brought her father his house shoes, she discovered that they were dirty.

"Father," she exclaimed, "you'll never tell me again you haven't been out in them?"

"Nay, my gell," said he, eyeing the shoes with lively reproach; "I never go outside th' door in them!"

Evelegh's thoughts were engaged day and night with other anxious matters, and the small mystery did not trouble him: his shoes had somehow become dirty without his knowledge (just as a spear of grass would shoot in the night without his seeing it); they must be cleaned, and there was an end of it. Not so was his daughter. She was curious, and she had a woman's quick suspicion of repeated facts. Twice had she seen these shoes dirty,—twice on a Monday,—after sober and staid use, that is, on the Sunday. And she believed she had seen this time the shoes clean on her father's feet on the Sunday evening. What did that mean? What did it point to, but that some time between Sunday evening and Monday morning her father went out of doors—without his own knowledge, it would appear? The mere thought caused a creep of superstitious dread to seize her, for she had heard strange things of people who walked in their sleep, looking for all the world as if they were awake; but she resolved that on the following Sunday night she would be on the watch,—for who could tell what harm her father might incur, what uncanny danger to health and life?

The following Sunday night Evelegh went to bed early, according to his habit. His daughter sat some hour or two later, and then went to her room, to wait with palpitating heart, and with her door open. She did not undress, but she wrapped herself from the cold, and sat with her ears open to every sound in the house,—and the house, like all old houses, had night-sounds which she had never been awake to hear before—rustlings behind the washboard in her

room, soft shakings of doors below, as of one trying to enter unnoticed, and, most alarming of all, cracks and creakings on the stairs, as if caused by a stealthy step. She was brave enough when she heard them to go to her door and gaze into the darkness, but she was not brave enough—or not dull enough—to repress the creep of imaginative dread when she saw nothing.

It was past midnight when she heard a sound which made her heart leap. It was unlike the ghostly rustlings and fumblings and creakings which had troubled her, and it declared itself at once a real sound: it was the opening of a door without disguise or hesitation. Instantly she was on her feet and out in the passage, and her heart leaped into her mouth on seeing her father emerge from his room, bearing a candle in his hand, and arrayed only in shirt and trousers; from the sound of his step it was evident he had his shoes on also,—the shoes which had provoked her suspicion. Without looking to the right hand or to the left, he went forward in business-like fashion to the stairs and descended. She followed him noiselessly, and at the foot of the stairs contrived to put herself before him. Then she saw that his eyes were open, but evidently without speculation; for he took no note of her, nor seemed to remark anything about him, although he neither groped like one who is sightless, nor stumbled or went uncertainly. It was clear to Jenny now that her father walked in his sleep, and she trembled lest she should wake him; for she remembered to have heard or read that for a sleep-walker to be forcibly waked is fraught with the greatest danger.

He turned aside and passed into the kitchen, and Jenny followed him. He went to the door that led out into the farmyard, and began to undo the bolts. Then Jenny interfered. It must be thus, she thought, her father had caught his cough and his rheumatism;

and she laid her hand upon his and tried to lead him away. He stood arrested a moment, and Jenny was appalled by his look; his jaws hung and his eyes stared, as if he were gazing upon things unutterable. Then a laboured sigh broke from him; he yielded to her leading and turned away. With trembling, but without a word, she conducted him back to his room, where of his own accord he prepared himself for bed again. She locked him in, returned to her own room, and went to bed.

Early in the morning she went to her father, and found him sick, depressed, and inclined to tears. He said he had had a very troubled night; he was very cold, and he begged for a cup of tea. She went to the kitchen and made tea and took it to him. The hot liquid comforted him somewhat, and Jenny could not forbear speaking to him of his adventure in the night.

"Do you know, father," said she, "that you got up in the night and went down to the kitchen and tried to go out?"

"Me, gell?" he exclaimed. "What for should I do that?"

"But you did, father," said Jenny. "I don't suppose you know, for I believe you were walking in your sleep."

"Me? sleep-walking?" he exclaimed. "Sure-lie! Well, they do say a man that walks in 'is sleep and a ghost that will not lay is as bad the one as the other! Seems to me I might as well be a ghost at once! Are ye sure of that now, my gell—dead-sure?"

"Quite sure, father. Why, I followed you down and brought you back. If you had gone out, your shoes would have been mucky; so now you know the reason of what bothered us so."

"Ay, ay!" said he, and looked in wonder at his shoes, as for confirmation. "You'll be right, my gell!

—you'll be right! But these be queer unholy kind o' goings-on!"

After that he fell silent. He presently complained of pains in his joints, and his daughter prevailed on him to remain in bed. He grew worse, and before the day was out he lay helpless and knotted with rheumatism. The attack lasted for several days. His daughter was assiduous in her attention, and she grew more and more alarmed by the suspicion that her father endured trouble of mind as well as of body. He frequently sighed painfully; he would shake his head and purse his lips, and murmur strange things, which Jenny sometimes overheard;—as, "Yea; but it's true! She allus *did* say, 'His eye is a-seeing everything' . . . There's no gettin' away from that! . . . There His eye is!—Ay, Susan, Susan! You hev been well out on it this long time!" Then Jenny would understand that he was thinking of her mother, and she would turn away.

Jenny, who was not wanting in shrewdness of observation, remarked that her father's mental trouble seemed at its worst after a visit from the Squire; and she wondered, but came to no conclusion. At last, on the Friday, the secret of her father's trouble burst on her in all its horror. The Squire had looked in in the morning and found Evelegh rather better: he was less fevered, and his joints were no longer helpless and in pain.

"Oh, we'll have you about again next week," said he cheerfully, as he went out from the sick-chamber, "to wake the bulbs up."

"Yes," said Evelegh to himself; "I'm just like a holly-stick: I take a deal o' breakin'! It's 'break! break! break!' every way, and I en't broken yet! It's more than mortial man can put up wi'!"

Jenny left him to attend to something in the kitchen. She had not been there long when she

and Mrs. Sumner were startled by a tremendous crashing.

"Whatever can that be?" exclaimed Mrs. Sumner.

At once Jenny thought of her father, and sped from the kitchen. What she saw in the parlour made her aghast. Her father stood in his shirt, hewing furiously with an axe at the old oak secretary.

"Father, father!" she cried. "What's to do?"

She and Mrs. Sumner threw themselves upon him to arrest his arm and take the axe from him.

"Let me be, gell!" he cried. "They're there, and I'll hev 'em out! I'll put up wi' this no more! Keep away! I'll smash it to chips, but I'll hev 'em out!"

"Have what out, father?" asked his daughter gently, seeking to humour him.

But he was too shrewd for her. "Think I've gone off my 'ead, do you? Not yet,—I'm not! But I'll hev no more on it! I'm druv mad wi' thinkin' on it,—that's what I am! And I'll hev done wi' 't!"

Again he tried to strike with the axe; but his daughter and Mrs. Sumner (who could only plead, "Oh, John! John!") were able to overpower his impoverished strength. He struggled faintly; and then came a reaction. He was weak as water, and he sat down trembling, and slow tears began to ooze from his eyes, as if squeezed from a sponge. His daughter coaxed him back to bed, but he had suddenly become so helpless, after his paroxysm of exertion, that it needed both her and Mrs. Sumner to conduct him. After he had been tucked into bed again, he still wept, with his face turned to the wall,—wept with that slow, dull wringing of the tears which is so significant of utter weakness and despair.

"Don't you go away, my gell," he murmured, when the door shut upon Mrs. Sumner.

"No, father dear," said she. "I'm here. What's troubling you, my poor dear?" she asked. "What

is it you must get out of the secretary? What's troubling your mind, dear? Tell me, won't you? Tell your own daughter, who loves you, and who will never, never leave you for anybody! Tell me, father!" and the warm-hearted girl leaned over him, kissed his worn cheek, and mingled her tears with his.

"Oh, my gell, my gell!" he murmured. "You don't know! — you don't know! I never, never thought I'd hev come to this!"

"You can't mind me," father! said she soothingly. "I'm your own girl!—nobody else's at all! Look; I put my arms about you to protect you always!"

"I'm a bad, wicked old feller!" he broke out. "No, it's no use! I can't keep it no longer!—You know the papers Coverley lost? — you've heard on 'em? Well, I took 'em!—I took 'em! Wi' my own hand I took 'em out on his pocket that night!"

"Oh, father!" she cried: it was rather a moan of pity, than a murmur of reproach.

"I don't know!" he continued. "I was mad agin him about farm and about you! — and I done it! I done it! I was a gawmous idiot! But," he exclaimed with sudden energy, "I never knowed about th' Squire! I never looked at the papers—I popped 'em into a drawer in the old desk, and never, never looked at 'em!"

"They'll be there yet, then!" she cried, with a new excitement. "Mustn't you give them up now, father? Isn't that the right thing to do, my poor dear?—to confess what you did and give them up?"

"Ah, my gell, my gell! that's the dreadful thing! That's the punishment! And His eye is allus upon me, never winkin' at all, and never shuttin'! . . The papers en't there, my gell!—they en't there no more! —they en't! And I'm a miserable sinner, as has ruined his immortial soul! I'd stand it all, 'cause I hev deserved it, if I could only get 'em again, and

give 'em up! But they en't there!—they en't there! Ah, if God would only make 'em be found again, I'd die happy!"

Jenny tried to be calm, and to consider. "Have you looked for them, do you mean, father dear," said she kindly, "and can't find them?"

"D'you mind," said he, soothed somewhat by making his confession and sharing his trouble with one who did not repulse him, "that Sunday you told me Squire's papers were lost too — that Sunday the young lawyer came? Well, I made up my mind, as soon as ever I heard, to gi'e the papers up; and I looked for 'em next morning!—but never a paper! I've looked for 'em a many times since!—but no!—never a paper!"

"And do you mind, father?" asked Jenny, with sudden interest, "that it was that Monday I found your house shoes all over muck? You had been out in the night, and didn't remember it! You had been sleep-walking! Maybe that was the first time! And maybe it had to do with the papers, because you were thinking of them so, and worrying over them! Oh, pray God, father dear, that they may be found somehow!"

"I pray God every day o' my life, my gell!" said Evelegh. "But somehow it don't seem to do no good! My prayin' don't seem to rise no higher than the top o' my head!"

"Hadn't I better bring the Squire to see you?" asked Jenny, after a pause. "We must do what's right, father dear,—mustn't we? You must tell the Squire all about it, and perhaps he may think of some way of finding the papers."

"Yes, my gell; I'd better tell the Squire, and hev done! And I've been a bad, wicked father to you, Jenny, my gell! I hadn't ought to hev come between you and Coverley!"

"You mustn't say these things, father," said Jenny

"I won't hear you say such things about yourself! You have been a dear father to me!" she exclaimed, with feminine generosity ignoring the truth; "and I love you with all my heart! And we shall never be parted as long as you live!"

CHAPTER XXIX

A BEDSIDE OF PAINFUL MEETINGS

THE Squire came on Jenny's summons, and heard Evelegh's confession. He was generous and forgiving; he was less astonished than humiliated; for, he thought, what should he say now to that clever young solicitor who had seen deeper than he, and who had understood John Evelegh better than he who had known him since he was a boy? But he might have been consoled if he had considered that the fewer a man's faults and temptations, the less able is he to understand the faults and temptations of others.

When he heard of the sleep-walking, he advanced a simple but plausible theory of its connection with the lost, and now missing, papers. Thus: Evelegh, troubled in mind about them, now resolved to surrender them and now inclined still to keep his knowledge of them hid, had gone down to the secretary that very first Sunday night, had taken them out, and had hid them somewhere out of doors; and that again and again he had walked in his sleep and shifted them,—every Sunday night, perhaps, for then he would be less tired in body and more active in brain than on other nights, and the nights for several weeks were frosty, so that the tale of his going and coming would not have been told as on the marked occasions by his muddy shoes. Yet the Squire would determine on nothing to be done until he had seen Coverley; and therefore he went

home and wrote him that hurried note we have read.

Jenny also looked forward with an anxiety of her own to Coverley's expected appearance. She had something which she felt she must say to him without delay; and when he did not come on the Saturday, she waited perforce till the Monday, and then she carried out a resolution she had come to in the religious quiet of Sunday; she dressed herself in her best, put a little money in her purse, told Mrs. Sumner she would not be home till evening, and set off after breakfast to have an interview with her lover in London.

And now, mark with what an eye to effect and coincidence fate will often work.

Adela Pierrepont had gone down to East Dormus for Sunday. She had been surprised that Mr. Coverley had not met her at the station to go with her as arranged, and when she arrived at home, her father was surprised and disappointed that he had not come.

"I wrote him a pressing note, too," said he. "I wonder why he hasn't come? Can he be ill, do you think? He was *not* looking very well when he was here last. The want of country air and country work is telling on him, though it doesn't seem to make any difference to you, you monkey. I'm sure," said he, philosophising like a simple soul, "we'd all be very much better if we could be content with simple country duties and simple country pleasures. And why can't we? But I tell you what, you or Cousin Philippa had better look him up in that den of his in the Temple. If he's ill, he must be in a fix there for anybody to attend to him."

So troubled was the household on Coverley's account that Adela returned to London on the Sunday evening, in order to visit the Temple as early as possible on Monday morning. Cousin Philippa

had for some time established herself in London as Adela's duenna, and she accompanied her to the Temple after breakfast. They reached the chambers at the hour when business begins in the neighbourhood of the Law Courts; so that the very handsome and distinguished young lady and her eccentric-seeming companion attracted much notice. Clerks with blue bags looked wistfully at Adela, and then glanced with a smile at Philippa; and the young gentlemen of the Temple twisted their moustaches with an air of gallantry; even old fogies, consumed with business, and grave pleaders in Chancery and Equity, gave juvenescent glances of curiosity. The ladies climbed the stairs, and came to a door on which was painted, among other names, "Mr. Lionel Coverley." The knocker was tied in a woollen glove, and the ladies glanced at each other in fear of what that might mean. Philippa raised her hand and dealt with the knocker gently. The door was so promptly opened by a young man that it seemed as if he had been lying in wait. They discovered that he must have been, in a sense; for when they inquired for Mr. Coverley, he did not answer at once, but turned aside into a little den or closet which was labelled "Clerk's Room."

"You wish to see Mr. Coverley on business?" said the clerk, eyeing them with curiosity, and speaking as if in confidence.

"No, not on business," answered Philippa.

"We are friends of his," said Adela; "and we should have seen him on Saturday and yesterday."

"We didn't see him," broke in Philippa; "and we are afraid he must be ill;" and she gave a glance at the muffled knocker.

"He *is* ill," said the clerk, glancing also at the knocker. "I tied it up because there are so many people come knocking in the course of the day."

"When did he fall ill?" asked Philippa.

"When I came in on Saturday morning," said the clerk, "to get Mr. Flynn's letters, I found him lying here with a letter held tight in his hand."

"Poor fellow!" ejaculated Adela.

The clerk looked interested in her concern. "I got him back to bed, and went for a doctor. He says it's just breakdown—bad breakdown."

"Breakdown?" exclaimed Philippa. "And has he anyone to nurse him up again?"

"Well, ma'am," said the clerk, "I do what I can. I've stayed the two nights with him, and the laundress comes in."

"That's not much!" said Philippa curtly. "Is she with him now?"

"No, ma'am," answered the clerk; "she's just gone. I was going round presently to tell his friend, Mr. Ridgeway."

"Never mind Mr. Ridgeway now. I'll look after him. But I won't startle him. You just go in first, like a good man, and tell him that Miss Philippa Pierrepont is here."

In a few seconds Philippa entered Coverley's room, and in a little while Adela was called in also.

"I want you to stay here with the patient, my dear," said Philippa, "while I go and see about getting him out of this."

"It's awfully good of you both," said the patient, in a somewhat weak voice that strove to be cheerful, "to come to see me like this;—I think it kinder than I can say: but I'm very nearly well again; it's nothing: I'll be about again in a day or two, and I'll be all right here: I shall really."

"Fiddle-de-dee, my dear young man!" said Philippa. "Your doctor, I've no doubt, told you not to excite yourself with talk; and if he didn't, your nurse does: I'm your nurse. All right here, indeed! Why, could you believe it?" she said, turning to Adela, "this is all the room he has! And they call them

'chambers'! I never before heard such a misapplication of a plural! It's shameful! The Local Government Board, or the Vestry, or the County Council ought to interfere."

"It's not much of a place," said the patient; "but space in the Temple is very dear; it's as overcrowded as a rookery."

"Humph!" observed Philippa. "That's more than can be said of most temples, I believe!" It was not a great joke, but it tickled the weak brain of the patient; he laughed out of sheer weakness, and out of weakness he continued to laugh past all reason,—till Adela, who had no experience of illness, looked at her cousin in alarm. "Let him be. It will do him good," murmured Philippa. "I must go and find the doctor that's been attending him; for out of this we must get him."

"Where shall we take him?" asked Adela.

"We must take him to our lodgings: there are plenty of rooms to let. I'll get a cab while I'm out. You stay here," continued Philippa. "Get him to eat and drink, and to understand that we're going to carry him off. Good gracious! what would your father think if we left him here, or let him be taken to a hospital?"

Philippa went out, and Adela remained with the sick man. She had no false modesty, no prudish shame in being there alone with him,—no more than had Elaine in the cell of the stricken Launcelot,—and she put off her hat and jacket, and moved gently about the room getting the patient this and that, soothing and cheering him in spite of himself. She was thus engaged when the clerk, after tapping softly at the door, opened it, and showed a face of perplexity and wonder.

"May I speak to you, miss?" said he. Adela went to the door. "There's a young lady here, miss," he said, "wants to see Mr. Coverley,—says she must

see him,—says she's come up from the country on purpose."

A suspicion of the truth touched her, and she looked out into the passage. Her suspicion was true: the young lady was Jenny Evelegh.

"Oh, it's you, Jenny!" said Adela; "I thought it might be. But how did you know he was ill?"

"Ill?" exclaimed Jenny, and came on, and passed Adela into the room, without asking leave. Her face was hard and pale, her eye bright and restless with excitement, and she glanced from the person in the bed to the other standing near her without uttering a word.

"Jenny!" said Coverley faintly, trying to raise himself on his elbow. "Is that you?"

"Yes," she answered, without going nearer, "it's me, Mr. Coverley."

That formal vocative made Adela glance in surprise at Coverley, and made him glance in surprise back.

"Something has happened, Jenny," exclaimed Coverley. "What is it? The Squire, now I remember, wrote to me that something had happened to your father. What is it?"

"He is ill too," said Jenny curtly. "He is in bed —has been for a week—with rheumatism! He wishes he could die!—for death's not so bad to bear as disgrace!" And again her gaze flashed from Coverley to Adela.

"Jenny, Jenny!" said Adela persuasively, and in a low tone. "Don't talk like that. Don't you see how you are troubling and exciting him? If you have any bad news, don't tell them now!"

"They may be good news, for all I know!" said Jenny aloud. The tone and the manner were so unlike those of the Jenny she had hitherto known, that Adela stood in dumb amazement.

Coverley lay still and heard with the sharp ears of

the sick,—heard both what Adela had said and what Jenny,—and he spoke quietly. "You are not yourself, Jenny. I don't understand what you mean by bad news being good news, but you had better speak out, my dear, whatever you have come to say."

"Nay," said Jenny, torn between contradictory feelings, and relenting a little with her lover's voice in her ears; "I'd better go away again and hold my tongue; I'll make you worse by talking."

"You'll make me worse by holding your tongue, now, Jenny," said Coverley.

Then Jenny's declaration came in a flood of passion. "My father's ill,—I told you. He has confessed to me that it was he that took those papers you lost! But they are not found yet! Father has been walking in his sleep, and he must have hid them somewhere, and when he will walk again, asleep or awake, we do not know! And there is something I have come to say!—I have come on purpose!—I couldn't wait!"

Jenny paused an instant, and Adela said hurriedly, "You would like to talk alone together: I will go away." And, so saying, she glided from the room.

Then Jenny's excitement broke forth again. Her cheeks and eyes were aflame with jealousy. She forget altogether her lover's illness.

"What is *she* doing here?" she demanded. "Why is *she* attending on you? Wouldn't I have come if you had written to me? It shows me plainly that you don't love me,—I've felt it for a long time!—and that you've been deceiving me! You love her! You know you do! Didn't I see you that time in the dogcart! You might have told me! But never mind: it makes easier what I've come to say. Everything must be at an end between us! I could never, never marry you after what father has done to you! We are disgraced!—But oh, Lionel, Lionel,' she cried, in another spasm of jealousy, "you might have

waited till I came to tell you! Surely you might have waited!"

"You are horribly mistaken, Jenny," said Coverley, "but I can't argue with you about it. I don't understand all you have said. I feel I'm weaker than I thought. . . . But I don't see why your father's fault need make any difference between us; I never proposed to marry him," he said, striving to speak lightly and cheerfully. "And Adela's being here is the purest accident: she came a few minutes ago with Miss Philippa,—she's just gone out for something. . . . I can't talk any more, Jenny. . . . Would you give me some of that drink?"

Jenny was instantly on her knees beside him, her bosom shaken with quivering sighs; and when she had helped him to his drink, she hid her face on his hand, that hand which had lately been so strong and brown, but which London existence and his short but severe illness had whitened and thinned. "Oh, my poor dear!—my poor, poor dear! I am ashamed!" she cried. "I am an ill-tempered beast! . . . Ah, you have not thought I had a temper! . . . And I've upset you! . . . Please forgive me—forgive me!"

"Forgive you, Jenny?" said he. "Of course I forgive you! . . . But how jealous you are,—eh? Beware of jealousy, Jenny!"

She rose to her feet, though she still looked humbled and ashamed. "Please don't misunderstand me, Lionel. You're thinking—aren't you?—that we are going on again as before." She shook her head. "No, my dear—never, never!—never again! I can never marry you—if I ever marry anybody, after what father has done! I've thought it all out, and I can't go back on what I've said! And please don't make it hard for me, and—and don't write to me any more, please! Good-bye, my dear! Good-bye!" She clasped her hands tight before her; she would

not go near him even for a final kiss; and he lay overcome with the scene, the tears weakly welling from his eyes. The sight of him thus weak, who dwelt in her memory as so strong, wrung her heart. If she gave way fully to her feeling, and embraced and comforted him, she knew she would bind herself and him anew, and that must not be. But he appeared so helpless—his tears still oozing unheeded, —that by a simple, natural action, swift, instinctive, she drew out her handkerchief, knelt by him, and dried his eyes, murmuring, "Don't!—don't!—don't cry! You will be better without me!—oh yes! far, far better!" And then she rose swiftly as she knelt and passed from the room.

Without the door she found Adela in the passage, the clerk having politely shut himself into his den. She seized Adela's hand. "Oh, I'm afraid," she said earnestly, "that I have behaved rudely to you, but don't, please don't, take any notice of how I behaved! Oh, it's terrible and frightening to feel as I felt! And I'm afraid I've upset him! I'm sorry, very sorry; but I had to do it!"

"Do what?" demanded Adela in alarm.

"Tell him that it must be all over between us after what father has done!—and after what I have seen! But be good to him! You will be good to him,—won't you?—and forgive my bad temper!"

"Yes, yes, Jenny," said Adela; "but I don't understand this at all! Stay, Jenny," she said, for Jenny was hurriedly taking herself off. "You're not going yet? *Where* are you going? Tell me: what is all this about?"

Jenny turned again an instant and said with vehemence, "You ought to know what it means, Miss Adela! You have taken my love from me! But I forgive you! I give him to you! Make him well, and keep him safe!" She opened the door to be gone, and was face to face with Philippa and the

doctor. She passed between them and disappeared down the stairs.

"Mercy!" exclaimed Philippa. "Who is that? What has happened?" she demanded, with a sharp note of alarm; for Adela was standing stricken and amazed, with her hand on her bosom.

CHAPTER XXX

THE WAKING OF THE MOTHER

WHEN Coverley had been successfully moved from his "chambers" in the Temple to the house in Bayswater where Philippa and Adela lodged, one of the earliest proceedings of Philippa was to sit down and write to the Squire how she had found the young man and what she had done. Immediately came a grateful reply from the Squire, in which he could not refrain from saying that he believed she had rescued and was entertaining a relative unawares; and having said so much, he told all his suspicions. Philippa and Adela sat at breakfast when the former read the letter.

"Well, now!" she exclaimed. "Though he is more like somebody else, I always thought there was some hint of William about him!"

"About whom?" exclaimed the wondering Adela.

"Read that," said Philippa, handing the Squire's letter. "I think you ought to know. Your father may not approve, but I think it silly to keep such things from a girl at your age." And when Adela had read the letter, Philippa told her how she had been engaged to be married to Sir William when he had become entangled with the actress, Coverley's mother. "And to think," she mused, to Adela's amazement, "that he might have been *my* son! But we must keep this from him at present, as your father advises."

From that hour Philippa seemed to regard Coverley

as if he were her son;—for an outlet for maternal feeling is a greater necessity with most women than the satisfaction of sexual love, the latter being with them but an introduction to the former; and a woman who has a child is seldom accessible to lovers. Philippa, then, nursed and waited upon the young man with the extremest assiduity. He soon began to recover under her tender and intelligent care, and he gratified her—he who remembered nothing of a mother's love—by manifesting for her more and more the affection of a son.

Those weeks of illness and convalescence were a pleasant time for all three. Coverley wrote one or two letters of tender expostulation to Jenny concerning her renunciation of him, but Jenny took no notice of them.

His attention, however, was distracted somewhat by letters from the Squire, who set himself to interest and amuse the invalid with gossip on the topics which were interesting and amusing himself. He wandered about with the full story of Evelegh's sleep-walking and confession, the impression made on his imagination by Ridgeway's "window," and the unlikelihood of laying hand on the newly-lost papers until Evelegh should be rid of his rheumatism and be free to walk again; he told of his own progress with the kind of farming which Coverley himself had invented ("Bulbs and all," he wrote, "are doing famously, and I have a plan in my head for getting all the stuff to Covent Garden by road, for railway rates are prohibitive"); and in another letter he said curtly that he had heard Philip had gone to Birmingham to be married to Miss Swinton by special licence. At the same time, Philippa received a letter from Philip himself, with the intimation that his wedding was to be a very quiet affair, else he would have liked the presence of his "dear cousin Philippa."

"I'm glad it's going to be quiet," said Philippa.

"All weddings should be quiet." And that was all she said.

Furthermore, Coverley's sore heart was comforted, and his active mind was engaged and occupied, by Adela and Philippa. Adela was, in her way, working hard. She gave lessons enough on the violin to keep herself with economy, and she had practised so industriously with her admiring violin master, Signor Sagasta, that she was about to give a violin rehearsal with him (I believe "rehearsal" is the word) at Prince's Hall. Adela practised for two hours every day between tea and dinner time, and it was Coverley's delight to listen to her, with his door open, while he was still confined to bed, and sitting by the common drawing-room fire when he was able to leave his bed. The soft string sounds seemed now to weave themselves into a garment of strength for him, and now it seemed as if the bow opened springs of sweetest music, which flowed and spread, and in which he bathed and freshened and stimulated his soul. It was a time fraught with sweet and dangerous enchantments for both.

Mr. Ridgeway sometimes came to tea, and sat in silence through these rehearsals. Coverley began soon to discover that there was some secret between him and Adela and Philippa,—a secret in which he had neither part nor lot,—and he became aware, to his discomfort and surprise, that he was jealous of that.

Thus those few weeks passed away, but their quiet pleasure and hope became streaked and shot towards the end of the time with doubt and anxiety; for nothing had been heard or discovered of Sir William, and the fatal twenty-fifth of March was at hand,—the fatality of which all had by that time learned to understand. If, as Coverley said, Ridgeway had not been able to "cocker himself up" with his justified suspicion of Evelegh's theft (all pertaining to which had been

amply discussed between them), he would have been in a condition of inert and limp despair over his absolute failure to find trace or tidings of Sir William. He had gone so far as to utter advertisements in *The Times*, *The Standard*, *The Daily News*, and other papers, fashioned thus: "To Sir William P——. Remember the threat for Lady-Day." (It had just occurred to him to use this quotation: "Remember March, the Ides of March remember"; but he knew the old Roman Calendar well enough to see that that would not suit the actual date.) "If you would avert its fulfilment, communicate with Ridgeway, solicitor, Portugal Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields." But nothing had come of these advertisements, and he began to fear that Sir William might have left the country.

Then suddenly their fears received a new fillip. Ridgeway appeared one afternoon in what was, for him, an extremely disturbed condition. He dropped into absences of manner, and his "window," as Adela observed, seemed frequently "darkened"; for he found it often necessary to take it from his eye to be cleaned and polished. It was not till he was urged that he would tell what so affected him.

"Mrs. Stonebridge," said he, "has called on me to-day. She was in a terrible tantrum. I must say I am sorry for her. That piece, you know, has been off the stage of the Variety for the last two or three weeks, and for about the same time she has failed to get her usual seven pounds; and all the explanation the solicitor has to give is that he has not received it."

"That must be Philip's fault!" exclaimed Philippa. "His neglect merely, I daresay! But it's awkward. He's away on his honeymoon, you know. I think I can put that right."

"It would be wise if it can be done," said Ridgeway; "for Mrs. Stonebridge to-day was not to hold or to bind. She thinks the money has been withdrawn on purpose just at the time when she is out of an engage-

ment, so that she may be made destitute and unable to carry out her threat for the twenty-fifth. She declares she'll fulfil that threat at once, and expose the family at East Dormus, though she and her brother may have to tramp there!"

"She's a terrible woman!" exclaimed Philippa, with a lively recollection of her interview.

"Yes," said Ridgeway; "she is hard to manage." He considered Coverley a moment, and then turned his shining "window" on Philippa. "If you can promise that," said he, "I think I can keep her quiet."

When he rose to go, he tempted Philippa into the passage for a private word or two; and though Adela and Coverley noted the fact with mock seriousness, its significance was not apparent until afterwards.

Next morning Coverley received an urgent note from Ridgeway, begging that he would take a cab and call in Portugal Street that afternoon at two o'clock. Coverley, who had by then begun to go out to take the air, obeyed the request, wondering what Ridgeway could want with him in such haste.

Meanwhile, in anticipation of his coming, Ridgeway's attention was held by another person, who was no other than Mrs. Stonebridge, or Lady Pierrepont. Ridgeway had asked her for that interview. They had talked together for some time, when Ridgeway, in his male simplicity, made a false step. He said that he had happened to see one of the partners in Pierrepont's Bank, who chanced to be in London, and had set forth Lady Pierrepont's grievance, and that he had been empowered to give her a cheque for the omitted payments, and to assure her that they would not be neglected again. He was startled out of his usual *sang-froid* by the result of his statement.

"One of the partners, I suppose," the lady said, with a dangerous light in her eye, "is Miss Philippa Pierrepont?"

"She is," Ridgeway answered, with his smoothest

suavity, but with a touch of surprise; for Philippa had never told him of her notable visit to the actress.

"Then," declared Lady Pierrepont, with fury, "you can tell Miss Philippa Pierrepont from me that it's like her cheek to offer *me* her charity! I know her ways! She thinks she can come round me for the sake of the family! What has the family done for me, I should like to know, that I should think of it? I'll have none of her charity and her cheques! Let her send them to hospitals and poor relations! I mean to have my rights! and I'll have them, too!"

"Quite so, Lady Pierrepont," said Ridgeway. "You remember that when I first had the pleasure of making your acquaintance, I said that I intended also that you should have your rights. But do not, my dear Lady Pierrepont, be precipitate: my experience of clients has shown me how often a good case is ruined by being precipitate. Do not give your case away; wait at least until the twenty-fifth, as you said you would."

"*He* has broken his pledge, and cut off my money. Why shouldn't I go down to the family's place and show him and them up?"

Then Ridgeway played the card (a trump he believed it) which he had kept in reserve.

"Lady Pierrepont, may I in a friendly way point out to you that there is a strong reason why you should not make trouble down at East Dormus, or, indeed, try to put the family publicly to shame? You had a child, madam,—a boy,—who was taken from you when he was a baby?"

"I had. What then? Speak it out."

"Needless to say, the boy has grown a man. I am proud to have the honour of his acquaintance. He has been well educated, and he is a barrister, rising in his profession."

The actress's face flushed high and her bosom heaved. "Where is he? Is he in London?"

"Yes, he is in London," said Ridgeway. He looked at his watch. "I expect him here in a minute or two. I'm afraid I cannot bring you together yet. He has been ill, and is just recovering, and such a shock might upset him again. But you shall see him."

The actress said no word more. She sat with her hands clasped in her lap,—sat, save for the slight flutter that now and then rose in her bosom, quiet and rigid as a stone. There was silence between them for an instant or two. "Will he be long?" she asked.

Ridgeway was looking through the glass of his door. "Here he is," he said presently, and went out to receive Coverley in the outer office.

"Ah, here you are!" said he. "Not found it too much, I hope, to come down? You don't mind waiting a moment? I'm engaged with someone. Sit here out of any draught: you mustn't catch cold." And he got him a chair near the fire, and with the light of the window on it.

Then he returned to the inner room. "Have you seen him?" he asked at once.

"No," was the answer. "I was afraid to look. Tell me, is he like me, or like his father? If he's like his father, I shall hate him!"

"Come here and look," said Ridgeway, opening a little shutter which concealed a peep-hole of a window commanding a view of the outer office.

She went and looked. "I couldn't have believed without seeing it," she said, with a half-hysterical laugh, "that that baby of mine had grown so big and handsome!" She looked again. "I think he's like me. Don't you? I'm *sure* he's like me: he has just my nose. What a dear fellow he looks!" She turned to Ridgeway and said quite humbly, "Don't you think I might just have a word with him, and hear him speak? I can remember how his little baby

voice said 'Ma-ma,' and I should like so much to hear how it sounds now!"

Ridgeway was astonished by the change in her. She was transfigured from the woman she had been only a few minutes before; she was invested by a beautiful emanation of the feeling of motherhood, which subdued and softened her, and suffused and beautified her features. He was a little alarmed by the thought, "What if he is not her son after all?" but he thrust that aside, and was ready to make that appeal to her which he saw his opportunity of making. He was about to speak, when she exclaimed upon a new discovery: Coverley, it would appear, had shifted his position.

"Why," she cried, "I've seen him before! Of course! It's the young man that came to see me with the other Stoney!"

Ridgeway did not know whom she meant by "the other Stoney," and he did not ask: he was charged with the necessity of getting at once the result he desired. "That young man, Lady Pierrepont," said he, "is, you know, Sir William's heir, and he has, therefore, a closer connection with the Pierrepont family than you could ever have. I know he is on good terms with them, and is liked by them, and it is possible he may be in love with one of the young ladies. Now, Lady Pierrepont, I appeal to you. Can you, thinking of all that, do anything that would make him in the least degree ashamed of his mother?"

"Does he know I am his mother?" she asked suddenly, but without the bravado which had hitherto characterised her.

"No," answered Ridgeway promptly, "he does not."

"Then who does he think is his mother?"

"That I cannot say," said Ridgeway, feeling he was being pushed into an uncomfortable corner.

"What has his father told him?"

"His father, I know, has told him nothing. All

these explanations were about to be made," said he at a hazard, seeing a likely chance of an advantage, "when your difference with his father came about; and now we are only waiting for that to be settled, for everything to be put straight."

"That does not depend only on me," said Lady Pierrepont, "God knows!"

"It depends very much on Sir William, of course," said the suasive Ridgeway.

"He is a proud, hard man!" exclaimed the lady. "He makes no allowance for me! He never did!"

"Let us find him," said Ridgeway, "and then we shall see what can be done." The thought of her husband was making her face hard again, and Ridgeway became alarmed. "At anyrate," said he, "promise me, for the sake of your son, Lady Pierrepont, that you will do nothing till the twenty-fifth."

"Very well; I will," said she, heartily enough. "But now, mayn't I speak a word to him before I go, —just a little word or two, without saying who I am?"

"I think, Lady Pierrepont, if you will be persuaded by me, you had better not. He's very weak still: you would not like to be the cause of a relapse. But I tell you what: I'll bring him to see you one day when he is quite well."

"You will?" she cried. "Then I'll wait."

She went out by Ridgeway's own private door, and he returned to Coverley.

"Now," said Coverley, "what is it you wished to see me so particularly about?"

Fortunately, Ridgeway had an answer ready. "Come in," said he, "and I'll show you." They went into the inner office, and Ridgeway produced a letter, and said, "Look at that, and tell me if you know that hand or no. It came last night."

Coverley read: "*Sir William P—— presents his compliments to Mr. Ridgeway, and begs to assure him that his aid is in no way needed in the matter.*"

"Does that seem to you Sir William's hand?" asked Ridgeway.

"It does," answered Coverley.

"Well," said Ridgeway, and his glass sparkled, "now we'll find him. He is in London probably, for that was posted at 'Bedford Street'; and he is pretty well off, for that is written on good paper! We have something to go upon, and I'll get more presently; and then we'll soon put salt on his tail."

CHAPTER XXXI

HUSBAND AND WIFE

BUT for all his hope and device Ridgeway did not contrive to put salt on Sir William's tail. In casting about with Coverley for suppositions of how during the last six months Sir William had made a decent living, the notion was come upon that perhaps he wrote for some paper, a notion founded on these considerations, set forth by Coverley: Sir William could write; he had cultivated in the past the society of writing people, and had written sometimes on financial subjects; and he appeared to live now, judging from where he had posted his little note, in the neighbourhood of newspapers and publishers. That notion seemed so good that Ridgeway at once set about putting its accuracy to the test. The long-nosed clerk began to make the acquaintance of the foreman printer of every newspaper office from Charing Cross to Ludgate Circus: when acquaintance was sufficiently made, his business was to produce Sir William's note and ask if it was a handwriting, or like any handwriting, they were in the habit of seeing. But it was a tiresome inquiry, and after more than a week it had led to no discovery, and the fatal twenty-fifth was coming nearer and nearer.

But they had singular and unexpected evidence that Sir William was certainly about in London. The evening of Adela's violin rehearsal with Signor Sagasta arrived. Coverley was not permitted to go,

—for he was not reckoned sufficiently recovered to be out at night,—but Philippa went as Adela's watch-dog, and Ridgeway sat among the elegant amateurs in the stalls. It was at the end of the first part of the performance when Adela, led forward by her delighted master, was bowing and curtseying in acknowledgment of the applause of the audience, that she chanced to cast her eye on a group of people standing at the side, near one of the doors. She stood rigid a moment, with her gaze fixed on a gentleman there: she recognised her uncle, Sir William Pierrepont. The audience left off their applause, thinking that the charming lady-violinist was smitten with illness, when she swept a hurried, final curtsey and dashed into the "behind scenes."

"I've seen him! I must find him!" she exclaimed to Philippa, and swept out to intercept or lay hand on her uncle.

She was followed in haste by Philippa, who had scarcely laid hold of her meaning; but when they reached the place where Sir William had been standing, no Sir William was there. Inquiry of the curious bystanders only gave them the assurance that Sir William had been there, but had gone, having perceived, probably, that his niece had recognised him, and guessed that she would seek to speak to him.

Things continued in this condition of dead-lock, and all concerned or interested passed into a state of extreme tension and exasperation. Coverley was almost made ill again by it. He was urged to go down to the Squire's to recover in peace and fresh air; but he declared gloomily that a man carried his peace or dispeace about with him, and his fresh air too, and that he was going back to the stimulating atmosphere of the Temple as soon as ever he could, to make money to repay the kindness of his hostess. At that Philippa, who was also overstrung, looked

grave and then grim, frowned, and almost cried; and the scene was but a hair's-breadth from a precipitate revelation of their suspected relations, when Adela saved it by demanding lightly how much he expected to have to pay for board and lodging, and nursing and washing, with musical performances thrown in. The Squire wrote anxiously to Ridgeway, reminding him that the twenty-fifth was close at hand, and asking him what was being done to keep "that dreadful woman" from going down and promoting scandal and scenes at East Dormus.

Then, in his extremity of impatience with Sir William, who would not permit himself to be discovered, and of exasperation with the pass the whole situation had come to, Ridgeway struck his *grand coup*, the *coup* which, he was determined, would make Sir William declare himself and speak. He incited and advised Mrs. Stonebridge to make application to the sitting magistrate at Bow Street for advice under these circumstances:—She, an actress, married to a Mr. Stonebridge,—who was not Stonebridge, but who bore a name which she would only consent to write down for the information of the magistrate,—had been in receipt of a weekly allowance which for some weeks had been cut off; on repeated application to the person through whom it had been paid, she could only learn that he had not received it: what would the learned magistrate advise an inexperienced and almost destitute woman to do? Neither Ridgeway nor Mrs. Stonebridge really wanted the magistrate's advice; all that Ridgeway desired was that the statement should be heard and reported in the papers, so that Sir William should read it. It was heard, and it was reported,—reported all the more fully because of the mystery of the name disclosed to the magistrate.

Ridgeway's stroke was completely successful,—too successful, one may say, for it resulted in a horror which no one could have looked for, and which made

of naught all calculations regarding the issue of the situation.

Early on the very evening of the day on which the report of the proceedings at Bow Street appeared in the papers, a tall, grey-haired gentleman knocked at the door of the house in Bloomsbury where Mrs. Stonebridge, or Lady Pierrepont, lodged with her brother. He inquired for Mrs. Stonebridge.

"What name, sir?" asked the servant.

"Mr. Stonebridge," answered the tall, grey-haired gentleman. He waited an instant in the close-smelling hall of the lodging-house,—a hall ample enough of its kind, but charged, as it were, with the past odours of many meals and the past breaths of many lodgers,—till the servant had taken his name up to the drawing-room, or first floor, where dwelt Mrs. Stonebridge and her brother.

"Will you walk up, sir?" called the servant from the turn of the stairs.

The gentleman walked up, and entered the drawing-room. The table was laid for dinner, and Mr. Clare of the blank countenance rose with the evening paper in his hand.

"Lady Pierrepont, Sir William," said the actor, with his well-dressed but inexpressive enunciation, "will be here in one moment."

Sir William Pierrepont bowed.

Mrs. Stonebridge, or Lady Pierrepont, entered through the folding-doors from the next room: she had evidently gone to make herself presentable, according to her ideas of that quality, for the fresh touch of the powder-puff was apparent on her cheek. Yet she seemed to have determined to be merely lofty and polite with her husband; for, on entering, she recognised his presence with a bow and without any show of temper, and invited him to take a seat.

He undid his overcoat and sat down, showing his frock-coat beneath, still buttoned across his chest,

according to his old fashion. He drew a folded newspaper from his pocket and began to speak, while the brother kept his unwinking toad's eyes on the fire, and held himself outside the interview.

"I have read a report of an appearance of yours, madam," said Sir William, "at a police court, and I wish to ask you if the statement you are reported to have made is absolutely true?"

"So far as I have seen," said Lady Pierrepont, "the reports of what I said have been all right."

"Then it is true that for several weeks you have not received your allowance?"

"Perfectly true." There was a pause; and then she continued in excuse, "What could I do but go to the police court? I did not know where to find you or to communicate with you."

"I am not blaming you," said Sir William, "for going to a magistrate. But was there any necessity for saying that your husband's name was not Stonebridge, and for handing in his real name to the magistrate? That seems to me to have been mere gratuitous offence to me, like so much of your conduct in the past of which I have had to complain."

That plainly irritated her. "Shall I tell you why I did it?" she demanded. "If it hadn't been for that, do you think the reporters would have taken much notice of what I said? And I was determined they should take notice, and report; for I made up my mind to see you, to bring you here. And here you are!"

"And now that I am here," said Sir William, "what do you want with me? That neglect of your allowance will, of course, be put right: what else is there?" And he quietly produced a pocket-book, as if to make a note.

Sir William's manner was irreproachably polite, but it was offensive; it was hard, without a doubt, as his wife declared,—hard and smooth as glass. She

considered him an instant, and she became charged with heat and fire, as if her thoughts and desires bent on him were gathered and reflected back to her by his hard, smooth surface. Yet she paused; her bosom heaved, and she beat her hand upon her lap. She was moved by the thought of her son; she was in a mood to discuss with Sir William an accommodation of their differences; but he would not give her an opening: he was hard-bound in his formal English manner.

"You are a hard man! a hard man!" she said, with emphasis. "You are hard even with yourself! Oh, I wonder what you can be made of to go on as you do!—to treat me as you do!—and others!"

"To leave you out of the question for the present," said he, "what do you mean by 'others'?"

"Good gracious!" she cried. "Haven't I been for months pestered by your family for your address? One after another came: they all thought I must know it! First came your brother, and with him my son, you hard, bad man! I didn't know the gentleman was my son then, but I know now!"

"A very good fellow!" interjected the brother of the blank countenance. "Treats you like a man!"

"You shut up!" exclaimed his sister; and then resumed to her husband, "Next came Miss Philippa Pierrepont!"

"Philippa?" Sir William could not forbear exclaiming. "What could she have to say?"

"Have to say?" cried his wife. "A great deal!—a very great deal! Miss Philippa doesn't want for something to say, whatever else she may want for! Talk of *my* goings-on! they can be nothing to the nice quiet larks she and you have had together down there all these years!" Then, stung by the look of contempt on her husband's face, and perhaps a little ashamed of what she had said, she added, "She told me herself she had been your sweetheart!"

"It is an incurable defect in vulgar natures like yours, madam," said Sir William, "as I early perceived in my acquaintance with you, to read your own low sentiments and desires and behaviour into the chance remark of your betters."

"Betters, indeed!" cried his wife. "And who are you calling vulgar? If you saw my vulgarity so soon, why didn't you leave me and my vulgarity alone? There were plenty ready to have me, vulgarity and all! As for her!—a common, fat cook, showing her low neck at her time of life!—it's too ridiculous!—And offering me her charity cheques!"

"Cheques?" exclaimed Sir William. "Offering you cheques?"

"She offered a week ago, if you must know, to pay me up this allowance!"

"Why should she do that?"

"You don't know, I suppose,"—said his wife, emptying upon him at once her budget of ill news,—"of course you don't, that the bank you ran away from, thinking only of yourself and your absurd, stinking pride, and nothing at all of other people, and especially of the prospects of your son,—your own bank has nearly been broken, and would have been, if Miss Philippa Pierrepont had not gone in and planked down all her fortune to save it, all because you had been her sweetheart! Really, I suppose, she can't be a bad sort to do such a thing! and for a hard, miserable stone like you!"

A joint in Sir William's hard, glassy armour had been found and pierced: he was deeply moved. "The bank?" he exclaimed. "How can that have been?"

"And that's not all," continued his wife pitilessly: "your brother, the Squire, has been almost ruined,—I don't know how, but somehow through you,—and your son has had to come to London and turn

lawyer! He has been ill,—dead almost,—because he was so poor!"

Sir William turned exceedingly pale, and glared on his wife. "It is impossible!" said he. "I left everything straight for them! This must be some of your habitual exaggerations!"

"Oh, of course! And I suppose it's my habitual exaggeration that Miss Philippa Pierrepont is now a partner in the bank you ran away from, and has things pretty much her own way, from all I can make out! But I see that hit you; I won't be hard on you, as you've been on me. I'm an easy woman, if you will let me. Why can't you be sensible now, and let us go down and look after your banking business, for the sake of your son?"

All that she had said had irritated him, and her evil news had excited all that was worst in him, for it had smitten his pride; it had shown him he had somehow blundered, and must retrace his steps: and now that she should in her easy way propose that she should reap advantage from his blunder!

"What?" he said, pale to the ears and his lips twitching with contemptuous rage. "And take you with me?"

"You are really enough to try a saint!" she exclaimed, clasping her hands. "But I shall not lose my temper with you! Will you please to consider that your family relations down there see no objection to me, and that they think me a deeply-wronged woman?"

Sir William sneered, "Much they know about you, madam! Did you tell them how you had forgotten your duty as a wife, and dragged my honour in the dirt with a common, low person?"

"Oh, my God!" she cried, clapping her hands to her head and burying her fingers in her hair. "Am I never to hear the last of that? It was silly enough,

but will you never believe that no harm came of it? —never, never?"

"If no harm came of it, for that I have to thank myself!" said he.

"Why have I ever considered you at all?" she demanded, gazing on him desperately and with gathering hate and rage. "You were always hard with me! You never tried to understand me! You never humoured me in the least! You have spoiled my life, and I hate you!—hate you!—hate you from the bottom of my heart! You are the coldest and hardest man God ever made!"

"I have treated you with perfect justice," said he, "and I'll do no more. I have given you enough income to live comfortably without the theatre, if you like, and I shall continue to give it; but I decline to have you near me—I decline to have anything to do with you! Do you think," he continued, and there came into his eyes the hard glitter of hatred and unforgiving jealousy, "that I will incur the risk of having my house made the resort of every kind of theatrical and sporting blackguard, of having your name in the mouth of every kind of scum, and of seeing myself the laughing-stock of the country-side?"

"Oh, that's what you expect, is it?" she cried, stamping her foot and slapping her hands at him. "Then, my husband, that's what you'll have! Look out for it! Go home! go home! and prepare to receive me as Lady Pierrepont on the twenty-fifth! for, as sure as death, I shall come to you!

"If you venture to appear in East Dormus," said Sir William in cold, resolute tones, "so as to make any disturbance, I shall have you arrested as a madwoman!"

"A madwoman?" she cried. "You'll have me arrested for mad? Then, by G—d, they'll have something to arrest me for!"

Quick as thought, she snatched the carving-knife from the table, and swift and sudden as a savage she threw herself upon Sir William. But the toad's eyes had been openly observing all, and the brother of the blank countenance sprang forward to save his sister from murder. He was in time to save Sir William, but not to save himself. The knife drove into his side, and he fell with a cry.

"Oh, my brother!" shrieked the wretched woman, throwing the knife from her. "What have I done?"

CHAPTER XXXII

AT THE OLD BAILEY

THE actress's behaviour would have given colour to any accusation of madness Sir William might at the moment have made. She behaved as one demented past recovery. She was distracted with grief, and uttered such wild sayings as these:—"I've killed him! him, poor thing, instead of that provoking villain! . . . Oh, let me just think what I've done! . . . I can't believe it! . . . Oh dear, he can't be dead, surely! . . . He was a silly fellow, but he was good to me!" And then she passed into violent hysterics.

By that time the whole house was roused, and the room, one scarcely knew how, was filled with pale and horrified strangers. Sir William, pale also and horrified, but calm and resolute, sent for a doctor. The doctor came, examined the wound, and shook his head. There was no hope; the man might last an hour or two, but not longer. Then—then what need to detail the rest? The crime was not done in a corner, the news of it had already sounded in the ears of the police. The dying man's statement was taken *in articulo mortis*, and in an hour Mrs. Stonebridge—now quiet and dazed with wonder and horror of herself—and her husband were driven in a cab to the police station, he to tell what he knew of the matter, she to be detained.

In the night the poor man with the blank countenance ceased to breathe, and in the morning all the

papers contained the story of his death. Within half an hour of his reading it, Ridgeway was at the police station, inquiring for Mrs. Stonebridge. He found her husband with her, Sir William, and he introduced himself.

"Ah," said Sir William, "it's you that advertised for me? Why was it?"

"That's a long story, Sir William," said Ridgeway, calmly taking stock—to use an expressive vulgarism—through his "window" of the banker-baronet who had been so much in his thoughts, but whom he had not seen till now. "But I think I may say that if you had come home, this would not have happened."

The easy confidence of the young man obviously impressed Sir William, who had a practised eye for capable men. When they had left the prisoner, they continued to talk, and Sir William ended by asking Ridgeway if he would undertake to conduct his wife's defence.

"Gladly, Sir William," answered the young man. "Of course the case will be sent for trial; we must reserve our strength for that. And if you will permit me, I will get the first pleader at the Bar to appear for her."

"And who is he?" asked Sir William.

"Mr. Marmaduke Flynn," answered Ridgeway. Then, flashing his "window" upon Sir William, he continued, "A friend of mine and of yours, Sir William, is his junior; I mean Mr. Coverley."

Ridgeway was astonished by the baronet's reply. "Does he then," he asked, "still use that name? even at the Bar? Why has he not taken his own name now?"

"You mean yours, Sir William?" Ridgeway risked saying. Sir William signified "Yes." "He does not know that your name is his, though both your brother, the Squire, and I have guessed it."

"Guessed?" exclaimed Sir William. "What need

was there for guessing, when I set it all down in the papers I handed over to him?"

"Ah," said Ridgeway, "those papers! They were never opened, and they are lost." And he told succinctly the whole story.

"Dear, dear!" said Sir William; "things have gone terribly wrong!—terribly wrong! They could not have gone worse!"

They agreed that nothing could well be done to restore things until this anxious matter of law and justice were disposed of, and Sir William assented to Ridgeway's suggestion that, until then, Sir William should not show himself to his people, and Coverley should remain ignorant of his origin.

The coroner's jury returned a verdict of manslaughter against Mrs. Stonebridge, and she was formally arrested for trial on that charge. Then Sir William began to experience the shameful inconvenience of publicity. The sharp-nosed writers of the daily press, in noting the coroner's inquest, recalled Mrs. Stonebridge's application at Bow Street, and the mystery about her husband's real name, and they all demanded, "Who is Mr. Stonebridge?" The queries, the insinuations, and the gibes of these reckless writing gentlemen stung Sir William's sensitive pride almost beyond endurance, so that he was minded to rush into print with a revelation of himself, but Ridgeway dissuaded him.

"If you do," said the acute young man, "you'll only give them food for more articles. It will be necessary to reveal your identity at the trial: let that suffice."

Sir William agreed that that would be humiliation enough, and he nerved himself for it.

"At the same time, Ridgeway," said he, "since I must go through with it, let me be painted as black and cruel as you like, short of destroying my character altogether; I am prepared to endure anything

to lighten her punishment—I suppose she must be punished. I have no doubt what I said provoked her to rashness—make as much of that as you can."

The trial at the Old Bailey was set down for a few days after the coroner's inquest, but on the very eve of the day Mr. Marmaduke Flynn was stricken down with influenza. Coverley himself (who had kept his word and returned to the Temple, instead of taking a holiday in the country) brought to Ridgeway a telegram he had received.

"He hasn't been at chambers to-day," said Coverley, "and now at the last moment he sends this! What are we going to do? There's no time to instruct another counsel properly!"

Ridgeway's eyeglass flashed, he snapped his fingers. "That for Marmaduke Flynn!" he cried. "Now's your chance!" and he laid his hands firmly on Coverley's knee.

"Mine?" exclaimed Coverley, turning pale with agitation.

"Yours!" said Ridgeway, with emphasis. "'There is a tide in the affairs of men, which'—the quotation is something musty, but it applies. *You* must take Flynn's place, and haven't you got a splendid chance of scoring off him?"

"But this case, Ridgeway!" exclaimed Coverley. "To defend Sir William's wife!"

Ridgeway waved that aside as an irrelevant objection or scruple, and rose in his excitement and began to pace up and down. "I can see it all! It's the best thing that could have happened! . . . In your speech for the defence—it will have to be almost all speech—you get on the right side of the jury by humbly suggesting your inexperience in such cases, but excusing yourself on the plea of the suddenness of Flynn's illness—Marmaduke Flynn, your learned senior; make much of that! It will do beautifully! And I can promise you," said he, suddenly

facing Coverley, "that when it is all over, you will be thankful you conducted the defence instead of Flynn; besides the *kudos* that will come from it! Well, now, are you going to do it?—because I'm responsible."

"Yes, I'll do it!" said Coverley quickly, after a moment's hesitation.

"That's right. You know the whole story, and you've seen the brief, I daresay?"

"I've seen the brief—yes," answered Coverley.

"Well, look here," exclaimed Ridgeway, who was becoming more and more excited, "you'll stay with me, to-night, and we'll go through the defence together."

Ridgeway played Coverley well,—for all he was worth, to use an excellent sporting phrase,—but it cost him much anxiety and agitation to do it. He did not tell Sir William that Flynn was not going to appear in the case, and the first hint of his son's being in the defence was when he rose to cross-examine him after he had been examined by the counsel for the Crown. And Coverley, though his lips trembled with agitation, did cross-examine him acutely and severely, while Ridgeway's tense nervousness was only suggested to his intimates by the tightness with which his glass was gripped by the muscles round his eye.

The prosecuting counsel had got out the fact from Sir William that his last words to his wife on the fatal evening were a threat to have her arrested if she appeared at East Dormus and made a disturbance. Thereupon the learned counsel sat down, whereupon Coverley jumped up.

"On what charge did you threaten to arrest her—as a rogue and vagabond?"

"No," answered Sir William; "as a lunatic."

"Why on that charge?"

"Because I regarded her as having distinctly insane tendencies."

"But had you ever known her confined as a lunatic?"

"No. But I contemplated putting her under restraint years ago."

"Why did you not?"

"Because it is a serious slur upon a person afterwards."

Having reached that point, Coverley insisted on Sir William Pierrepont's distinguished identity. Was he not, he asked, the Sir William Pierrepont of Pierrepont's Bank at East Dormus? Was he not the person alluded to as Mr. Stonebridge by the accused in her application at Bow Street? He would admit, then, that Mrs. Stonebridge ought properly to be known as Lady Pierrepont. Why was she not so known?"

Sir William rebelled somewhat against that question. He, pale as death and grasping the rail of the witness-box, looked at his son, and his son, pale as death and grimly clutching with both hands the breast of his gown, looked at him. Sir William objected to answer the question; the Court overruled the objection.

"Because," he answered merely, "I did not wish her to be so known."

"Has Lady Pierrepont," Coverley asked, though he felt it was scarcely he who put the question, but merely an intelligent automaton in wig and gown with a spark of his consciousness, "ever tried to *compel* you to recognise her?"

"She has."

"With what result?"

"I refused."

Coverley did not press for a fuller answer. "And she was violently angry, I suppose?" he said.

"Furiously angry."

"Did she make any attempt upon your life then?"

"No; not then."

"Has she ever tried to *persuade* you to recognise her?"

"She has."

"When?"

"On the evening in question in this case."

"And then she *did* make an attempt on your life. So both threats and arguments failed to move you to recognise her?"

"Both."

"Do you think it surprising that a person of Lady Pierrepont's violent temper and insane tendency should have made that attempt under the provocation of your constant refusals to accord her what was her legal right?"

"I do not think it surprising."

That cross-examination showed the line of the defence, which was to work the plea of insanity. The plea was developed in the speech for the defence—and the defence was almost all speech, for there were no witnesses to call. Coverley made a point that told deeply with the jury, that the one witness he might have called, the one person who had known most of the accused,—the best and the worst,—her brother, had gone to his Maker to render his account. But first his excuse of his inexperience moved them to a generous view of all he might say, and the reason of his appearance in the place of a greater man—(and in spite of weakness after a severe illness, a personal allusion which he made very much against the grain, and only in deference to Ridgeway's urgent request)—that there was no other who could at so short notice undertake the adequate defence of a much-tried and deeply-wronged lady, roused both their pity and their interest. It was therefore to a jury well inclined to him from the first that Coverley opened out his defence of her who was his mother, though he did not know it. He spoke eloquently but tenderly of the defects of her early education, drew a touching

picture of the spoiled young actress, with her head turned with adulation, being courted and married by the handsome young scion of an ancient house, well known and respected in its native county. Then he became severe upon Sir William. He had signally failed in the intelligent, patient, and forbearing duty of a husband in these conditions. He had his own lofty, aristocratic, and conservative standard of propriety of temper and conduct, which, after the first flush of passion had waned, he evidently applied rigorously to his wife, who had until then lived under such widely different conditions. The result was such bickerings and disagreements, and ultimately hatreds, as made it impossible for them to live together. For that, was not the husband entirely to blame? He was an intelligent man of the world; he should have applied his intelligence and his knowledge of the world, not, as he did, to exasperate and alienate his wife, to ruin her temper and to provoke her constitutional tendency to violence, but to correct her faults patiently and lovingly and to educate her better qualities. He conceived it was the duty of a gentleman in Sir William Pierrepont's position, when of his own free will he married a lady in the position of the accused, to accept the situation and make the best of it, loyally to keep his wife by his side through good report and evil report,—short of open immorality, of which Sir William had not accused his wife,—and faithfully to protect and cherish her. Could the gentlemen of the jury conceive any condition of life more unsatisfactory, more exasperating, more *maddening* than that of a wife who was no wife, and especially who led a solitary, joyless life, pulled this way and that by the excitements and allurements and temptations of the theatre? Lady Pierrepont had led that life for five-and-twenty years, and that to his mind was sufficient to drive her so distracted as to impel her to make, under most severe and unjustifiable

provocation, that attack on her husband which had had so deplorable an issue,—even if there were not, as there was reason to believe there was, any hereditary taint in her of insanity. He was confident that the gentlemen of the jury would agree with him that at the moment of the attack Lady Pierrepont was not responsible for her actions, and that they would find accordingly.

Then came an unexpected, dramatic diversion of interest. In making that last appeal to the jury, Coverley turned directly round on them, and at the same time the light fell on him. The accused uttered a cry as a creature stricken to death.

"My son! my son!" stretching out her hands. "My own son! I did not know him in his wig and gown!"

Silence was ordered, but all accepted that as fresh, unasked, dramatic evidence of the poor woman's insanity. As for Coverley himself, he stood a moment with his excited brain, now high above his defence, revolving strange suspicions. Could the woman's cry be true? Was he her son? His eyes roved wildly from her to Sir William, and then his head swam, he reeled and fell with a moan,—to be caught in the arms of the watchful Ridgeway.

It was a dramatic ending to a remarkable and successful defence.

. . . . . .

In half an hour a verdict was returned of manslaughter when in a condition of unsound mind, and the judge sentenced Lady Pierrepont to be "detained during Her Majesty's pleasure."

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE END

RIDGEWAY had hurried Coverley into a cab after his sudden giddiness, and sent him off to be attended to by Miss Philippa Pierrepont in Bayswater. He and Sir William followed anon with the news of the verdict. The tears were in Sir William's eyes when he looked on Philippa and grasped her hand. She also was moved.

"Glad to see you, William," was all she said, however. "We've been looking for you a long time."

The meeting of father and son had more manifest feeling. The son blushed and apologised for the severe things he had uttered in his defence of his mother.

"I have no doubt, my son," said Sir William, patting him on the shoulder, "that most of them were deserved. Of course, you don't know all. It is not —it was not—fit you should know, or the public should hear, all. It is best as it is; you did very well. Indeed," said he, with a smile, "I had no idea you were such an orator!"

"Splendid!" struck in Ridgeway. "You've made yourself by that defence. I have no doubt briefs are already pouring into your chambers!"

"Chamber!" corrected Philippa laconically.

"You have saved your mother," said Sir William, "and I am grateful to you. You have practically saved her, I mean; for I understand that with a little

exertion on our parts she may be released in a few days."

Then they discussed, with Ridgeway's aid, what means should be employed to effect her speedy release. Their interest next turned to the Squire and East Dormus. Coverley—no longer to be known by that name, but as Lionel Pierrepont—himself proposed that they should all go down next day;—oh, yes, he would be well enough, and a day or two in the country would now do him good.

Next day, accordingly, a heavy four-wheeled chaise was slowly driven through the invigorating sunshine and the springing green of the beautiful, familiar country that lies between the Junction and Pierrepont Hall: that route had been chosen so that East Dormus should not first see the returning Pierreponts. Sir William and Philippa sat behind, and Lionel and Adela in front: they who had been lovers looking backward, and they who were yet to be lovers looking forward. They drove up the long avenue of limes, and were received at the door by Miss Pierrepont.

"You received my letter?" said Sir William.

"Yes," answered Louisa; "but we did not expect you so early."

"We have driven from the Junction," said Adela.

"Where is Robert?" asked Sir William.

He was somewhere round by the stables, Miss Pierrepont answered, and Sir William and his son went in search of him. "Round by the stables" they came upon a sight which surprised and touched them: the squire himself, in his shirt-sleeves and with braces dangling, was grooming a horse, hissing over his task in the most approved and cheerful fashion.

"What, Robert!—what's this?" exclaimed Sir William.

"What's what, William?" said the Squire, ceasing and looking at them with a shrewd twinkle in his

eye. "I was just rubbing down the horse before going to East Dormus to meet you."

"Have you no groom now, then," asked Sir William, "to do such things for you?"

"Groom? No; I'm my own groom."

"Robert," said Sir William, and there was an effect as of tears in his voice, "I am exceedingly sorry for this! It's my fault entirely,—all my fault!"

"No need to pity me, William," said the Squire. "Look at me;" and he certainly looked a very stalwart, healthy, middle-aged gentleman. "And look at yourself—when you can. You look twenty years older than me, doesn't he?" he appealed to Lionel. "And you're two years younger. I have better health than I've had since I was first married; and I was growing beastly fat, and now I'm all muscle; I sleep sound at nights; I have a contented mind, William; and, what may please you better, I'm making my market-gardening pay."

"I'm very glad to hear it, Robert," said Sir William,—"very glad, indeed."

"And I have been thinking, William," continued his brother, "that if squires and squires' sons would only stay at home and work as hard on their own land as they have to do when they emigrate to America or Australia or Africa, they would do very well, and the poor old mother-country would do very well too."

Then Sir William replied lightly, "Excellently observed, Robert; so, as 'Candide' once upon a time insisted, 'let us always attend to our garden.' But come in when you can; I want to have a talk with you about those lost papers."

"Oh, the papers!" exclaimed the Squire. "What need to trouble about the papers now you're back?"

"But there is great need, Robert!" said Sir William. "You don't know, of course, how valuable

they are. In the one packet, let me tell you, addressed to this boy, are the mortgages of Brockham and Holly Bush made over to him."

"Phew!" said the Squire. "That accounts for the doings of that sly dog Philip!"

"And in the other, addressed to you, Robert, are forty thousand pounds' worth of Egyptian bonds. They were meant to cover that debt and more: Egyptians stand very well now."

"I was convinced you hadn't really left me in the lurch, William," said the Squire, giving his brother his hand. "But poor old Evelegh—he must be waked up to find them, or put to sleep rather!" he laughed.

Later in the day they passed to the Home Farm to interview Evelegh, who was still confined to bed with rheumatism. When the young man whom he had known as Coverley was introduced as Sir William's son, the poor, broken farmer, loyal as ever in his heart to all the Pierreponts, was oppressed with a new and desperate view of his exceeding "wickedness."

"I humbly axes your pardon, sir!" said he, advancing a trembling hand to Lionel.

"Don't—don't, Evelegh!" said the young man, grasping and patting the shrunken hand.

"We all have a great deal to forgive each other, old friend," said Sir William; "so let us say no more about it."

"We have that, Sir William," said Evelegh. "If I could only mind where I put them papers, I think I could die happy; but I'm broken like a holly-stick, Sir William: I can nayther part nor mend."

"You'll mend yet, old friend," said Sir William, "and do many a year's good work."

But Evelegh shook his head sadly. "I'll *not* mend for that," said he obstinately. "I know the signs

and the tokens. No, I'll never do no more farming, nor put my foot in furrow again! I prays God," he added fervently, "just that my j'ints may supple a bit, and I take to walking in my sleep again just one night, and lay my hand on them there papers, and then I'd come back to this 'ere bed, I know, and die happy. Amen!"

What could his friends say to that? They could but bow the head, and be silent.

Lionel contrived to snatch a word or two apart with the weeping Jenny.

"Why," he asked, "did you take no notice of my letters, Jenny?"

"I'm gladder than ever now," said Jenny, "that I didn't."

"And you are still determined to cast me off—never to marry me?"

"Don't say 'cast off,' Lionel," said Jenny. "But marry you!—how could I think of such a thing now that I know you are Sir William's son, and a great lawyer? No; I'm a country girl, a poor farmer's daughter, and I'm not fit for such things." She said that with so beautiful a grace of humility that Lionel was tempted to take her in his arms and persuade her against herself; but she continued, "You must marry Miss Adela: she and you are meant for one another."

"You mustn't say that, Jenny," said he. "There is, I assure you, nothing between us. And since you persist in saying 'No,' I shall not think of marrying, for a long time at anyrate. I have my poor mother to think of: I shall have her to live with me."

"You are a good man, Lionel," said Jenny simply. "And the time we were sweethearts was a beautiful, blessed time to me. You have been very good to me, and I hope you will be happy!" and she turned and fled and hid herself.

Lionel returned to the Hall in a sad and sore

condition, somewhat of a puzzle to himself. He did not feel so "cut up" as he thought he ought to feel. Had he been the kind of man who can examine himself closely, he would have understood that, under one influence and another, whatever passion he had had for Jenny had ceased to exist, and that there remained only the habit of attachment,—habit which counts for so much in all the relations of life. He scarcely himself knew that, under one influence and another, he had begun to cultivate high notions of what was desirable in a wife, but Jenny with her subtle woman's wit had divined it, and had clearly perceived that she could never attain to the height of them. Moreover, Jenny's poor letters to him in London (though they had cost her many pains and tears) had appeared to him dull performances, all the duller by comparison with the smart, biting, intelligent talk of Adela to which he had so often listened; he had even consciously compared the two in his mind, quality by quality, but had trampled on the comparison as disloyalty. And, last consideration of all, it is not true, for the most part, that "absence makes the heart grow fonder," whatever monger of saws first passed the counterfeit saying off upon a too easily deluded world.

So it was in a bewildering condition of feeling—partly sad and partly glad, and wholly tender, soft, and yielding—that he entered the Hall and passed on into its drawing-room, where, as luck would have it, he came upon Adela. He was in the condition in which men must have a confidant of the other sex. Adela rose to go away; for since her scene in the Temple, in which Jenny had accused her of stealing Lionel's affections, she had been shy of being alone with him. But his look made her pause.

"You're not ill, are you, Lionel?" she asked in some anxiety.

"No," said he, "I'm not ill. I'm rather sad and upset," he added, with a wan smile. "Sit down and I'll tell you." He took her hand—merely as a cousin might—and led her to a seat. When they were seated, he did not let go the hand at once. He laid it in his other palm and looked at it. "I think," said he, "you have the most beautiful woman's hand I ever saw. I don't mean that it is so very small, or so very white; but it is so finely shaped, and it looks so capable."

"Don't be silly!" said she, trying to withdraw her hand.

"Wait a minute," said he. "Look at it compared with mine."

"Yours is a good hand, too," said she frankly, now laying her hand by his.

"It used to be much browner," he said, with apparent irrelevance.

"Poor Lionel!" she said, with a cooing laugh. "Do you regret the brownness? I mean," she went on, "do you regret what the brownness represented? Would you rather be in the country farming again?"

He let go her hand, and leaned back to consider an answer. "On the whole, no; I would not. It is impossible to go back upon your life; even if you could remake things as they were, you can't take up again the same feelings and views as you once had: it's impossible. And," he continued, "I've just had a word or two with Jenny."

She shifted in her seat, and looked troubled. "Oh!" said she. "Well?"

"She's quite determined to have no more to say to me." There was a short pause, in which the Paris clock on the mantelpiece for once seemed to make its ticking audible. "Would you call me, Adela, a faithless lover?" he asked. "Do you think I have treated Jenny badly?"

"Treated her badly?" exclaimed Adela, with a faint outburst. "I think you have been very patient with her! I think you have been a model of faithfulness. You have, I suppose, been trying to win her over again, though she gave you your *congé* that day in the Temple!" She blushed under her own chance allusion to a memorable occasion.

"Yes; she did," said he, with wistful assent. "But I was ill then, and I thought it my duty to make sure, now that I am well, that she meant what she said."

"And she did?"

"She did—evidently."

"Then I don't see what you have to blame yourself with. She has jilted you; you haven't jilted her."

"Jilted?" said he, considering the propriety of the word.

"Well," laughed Adela, with some constraint, "cast you off,—cut you loose,—given you your freedom: whichever you care to say."

"Yes," said he, still luxuriously meditative; "and the curious thing is, I feel rather relieved. Do you think I ought to be ashamed of that?"

"Really," she laughed, "I think that may be said to be inquiring too curiously."

The door of the drawing-room opened, and Philippa took a step into the room. "Oh, I beg your pardon!" she exclaimed, and withdrew.

Both had risen, and both exclaimed, "Come in, Philippa, come in."

"Not for the world!" said she. "It would be most unkind to disturb so comfortable a *tête-à-tête. Continuez, mes enfants!*" And she went.

A smile of languorous softness passed over Lionel's face. "Really," said he, with his eyes on Adela, "she thinks"—

But Adela had fled; a quick instinct had told her

that no man is so likely to make love with indecent haste and warmth as the lovelorn.

. . . . .

And what now remains to tell which my readers cannot guess? Philip, after a long private interview with Sir William, considered it advisable to end his connection with Pierrepont's Bank, to which, it would appear, he had done no good during his short *régime*. He took himself and his hard-eyed wife off to Birmingham, where he settled down to serve his disappointed father-in-law.

Adela gave up her attempt to earn her own living as a violinist. She found—what she had often before been told—that there were difficulties and dangers in that way of life which only the boldest, the most desperate and enthusiastic, or the neediest woman would face. She returned to her father's house, and Lionel, her cousin, frequently found himself there from Friday evening till Monday morning. He had a comfortable flat in town (besides ampler "chambers" in the Temple than heretofore), and his companion in that flat was a handsome lady, with hair quite white, and an exceedingly quiet and nervous manner, whom he called mother. Sir William had so far changed that he had invited that lady home to his own house, but she had trembled with terror at the suggestion.

And the lost papers? As the summer advanced, the rheumatism departed from John Evelegh, and one night he walked again. No one saw him do it; but in the morning he was found dead in bed with the packets in his hand, and his house-shoes by the side of his bed were muddy.

With the recovery of that property, there was no reason why the Squire should continue to live in his late contracted fashion, and he did not. But he did not give up his work, which, he declared, had been his salvation.

"I have found work," said he to his brother, who sought to reason with him about it, "the only way to render life endurable, especially in trouble."

"'Candide' again," said the banker. "'Excellently observed. Let us, therefore, take care of our garden.'"

THE END

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